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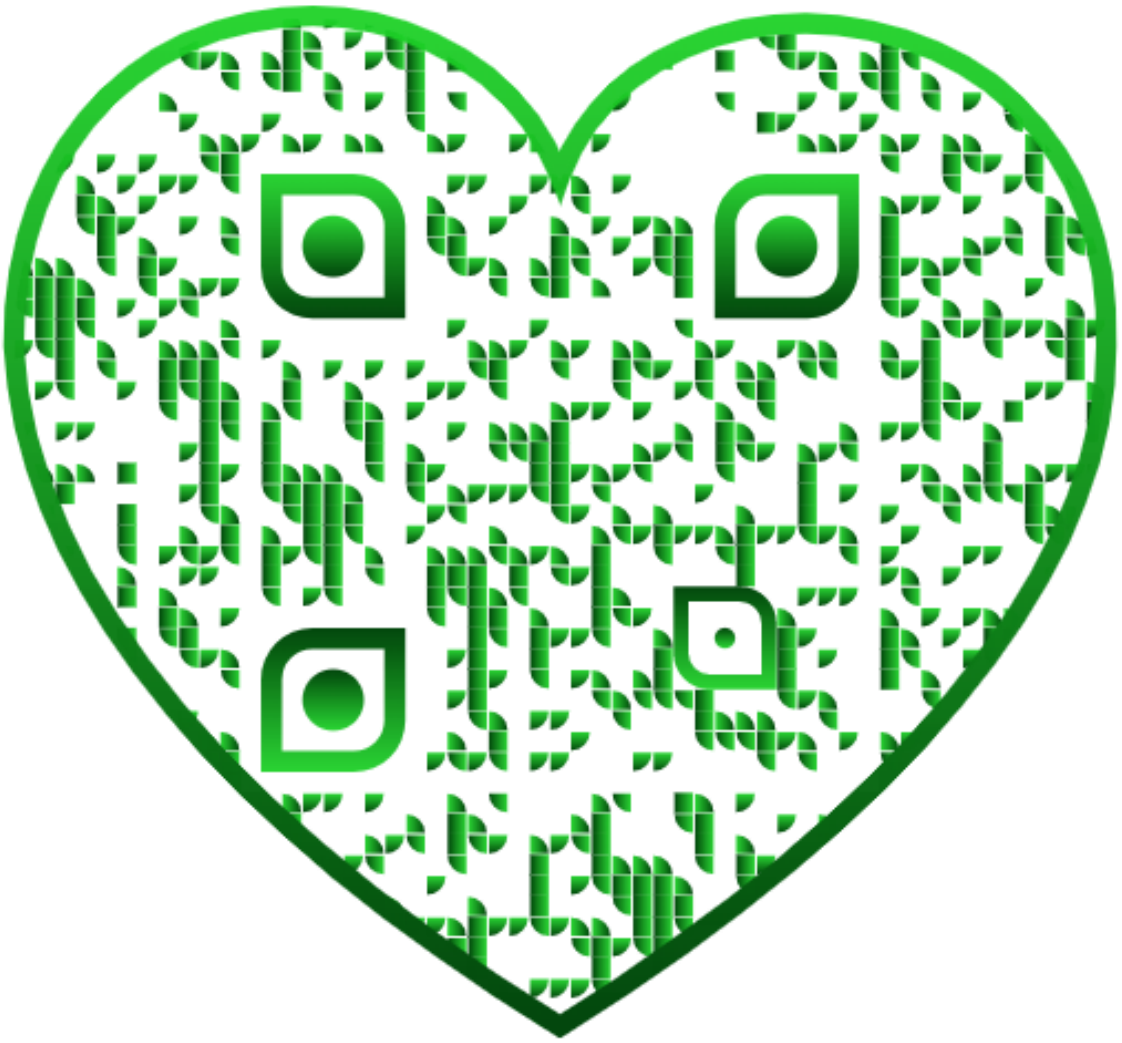

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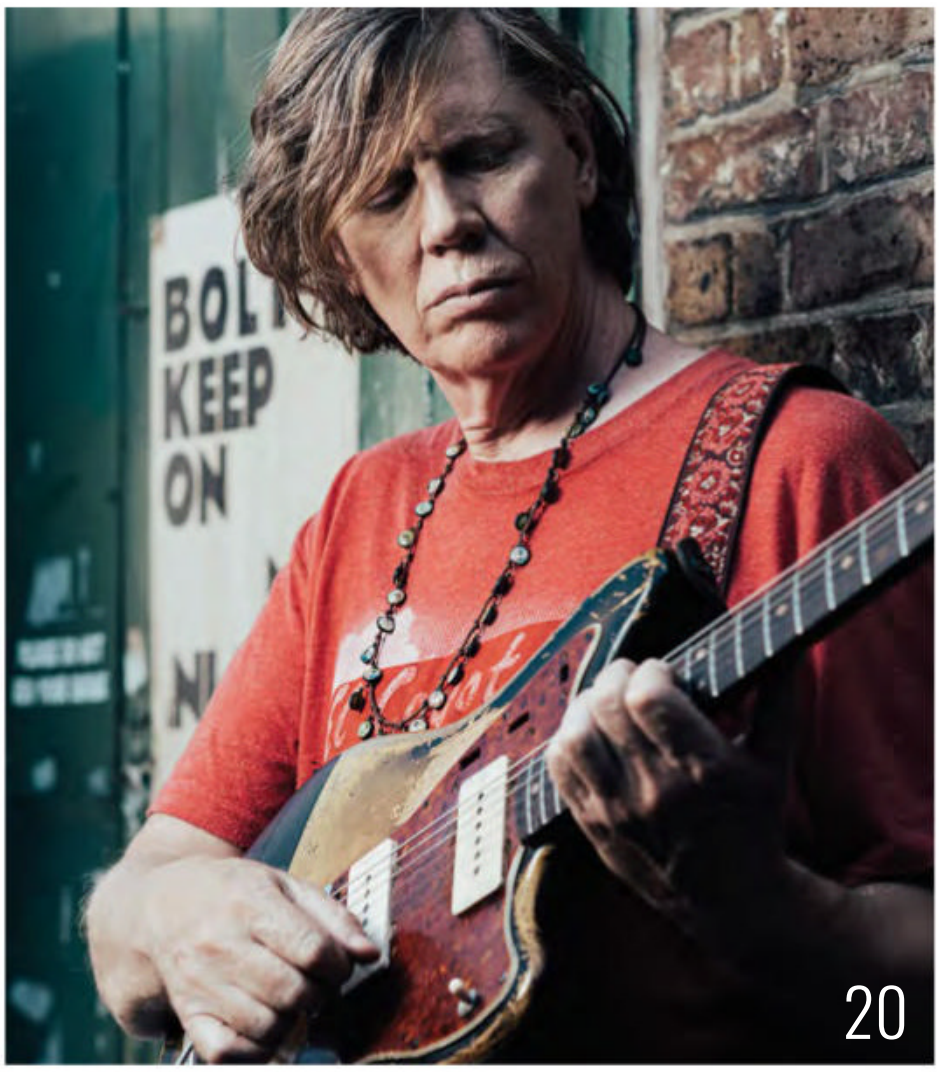
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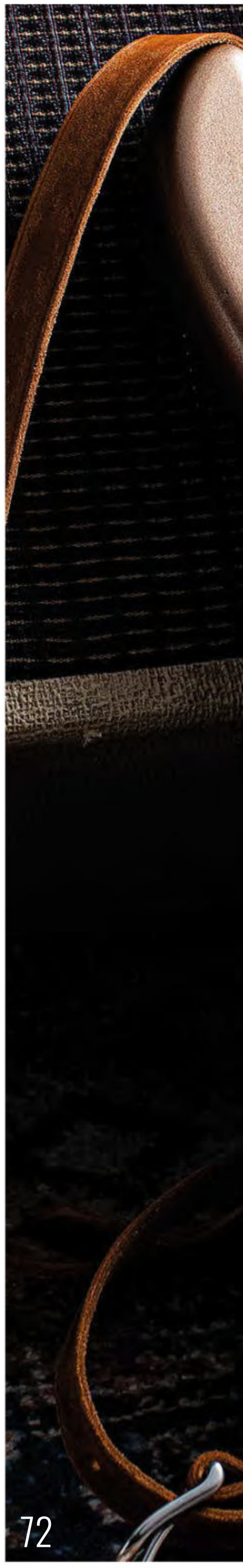
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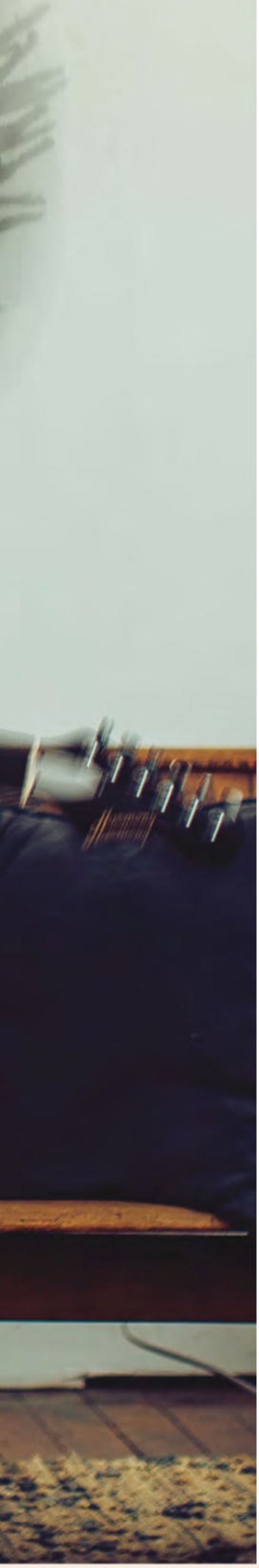

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EDITOR'S LETTER

CATCH A FIRE

With record-breaking wildfires raging in California, climate change has never been so vivid, nor so personal for the guitar-making community. Although conversations about sustainability and the environment in the guitar industry tend to revolve around wood, there are many other materials used in the manufacture, packaging and shipping of guitars.

Hopefully one day soon we'll see an end to single-use packing materials that are impossible to recycle. I'm delighted to announce that, as a brand, we're taking the positive step of moving away from plastic to a paper wrap for subscription copies. If you're reading this, you may already have noticed this fact as you gleefully tore through it to get to this month's magazine – here's hoping it has made its way to a recycling container rather than the dustbin.

If the magazine has landed on your doormat today or you've rushed out to buy a copy the moment it goes on sale then please head to **guitar.com/live** immediately, where on 2-4 October you'll find dozens of masterclasses, performances, interviews, workshops and panels, immersive VR exhibits featuring our founding partner brands PRS, Taylor, Ernie Ball Music Man and Mono, amazing giveaways and plenty more besides.

Guitar.com Live is set to be the most ambitious show of its kind and a guitar show unlike any other, and it's also absolutely free, so please check it out and write in to let us know which aspects you enjoyed the most. See you next month.

Chris Vinnicombe
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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

At *Guitar Magazine*, we really put the instrument under the microscope

PICTURE PERFECT

For years I have been an avid internet researcher on anything guitar and amp-related, and I recently ran across your vintage Telecaster shootout. I could not believe how beautiful your photographs are. I've never seen anything like them! That Telecaster article has the most original and detailed angles – I love how you get close up on the control knob and wiring harness, so you can see every little detail of a rare vintage switch.

I've spent years researching building guitars and amps and have never come across such stunning photographs. We *want* to see vintage details and beautiful photography, and someone putting some thought into the artistic direction. It is enormously appreciated. It makes me want to read all your articles just to see the photos.

I am in the process of building a vintage Telecaster and I am now so stoked after seeing the pictures and reading the article. Thank you to your photographer!

JIM, VIA EMAIL

DENMARK STREET '73 REVISITED

I found your recent article about the Denmark Street guitar shops fascinating, and it was good to see some reader feedback. Having been a visitor there myself many times over the past 50 or so years, I have a few tales to tell.

One sunny afternoon in the summer of 1973, I bunked off work to go and see what goodies were on offer there. As I approached Top Gear, I could hear someone raunching away merrily. To my delight and amazement, as I entered the shop I saw that it was none other than Steve Marriott, one foot on a chair, whacking out heavy chords on a vintage Les Paul. He'd obviously tried a few too, as there were many lying on the floor around him. I watched him for a few minutes, until he looked up and cut me a real hard look, then just carried on. The salesmen in the shop just seemed to let him please himself. They were probably as in awe as I was.

Another time, years later, I was toddling around down there and up walked Robert Plant, followed seconds later by the actor Dennis Waterman (of *The Sweeney* fame). Another time, I saw Tony Hicks of the Hollies, complete with mac, briefcase and brolly, looking very much the businessman. I guess he must have been going to a meeting with his accountant, as Proper Rock Stars do. I could go on forever but best I shut up now. See you all in the Blue Boar!

BOB 'ANGELO' SAWYER, VIA EMAIL

SOPHOMORE, MORE, MORE

I have been a subscriber for many years and always look forward to reading the next issue. Recently, I feel that with the new look, the mag has really improved throughout, and have had a little chuckle thanks to your witty photo captions. There is, however, a blot on the horizon with the creeping occurrence of the word 'sophomore'. This much-used term finds its natural habitat in American magazines and is one that I wish would remain Stateside. I cringe whenever I see it and earnestly implore you to weed this out from your otherwise excellent guitar tome.

DENNIS KING, VIA EMAIL

We're glad that you enjoy the magazine, Dennis, and we're sorry that the word 'sophomore' grinds your gears so much. That said, almost the entire lexicon of electric guitar terminology originated on the other side of the pond, not to mention rock 'n' roll itself, so perhaps those American imports aren't quite so cringeworthy after all…

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“STAYING HOME DURING LOCKDOWN WAS THE BEST THING FOR MY MUSIC, AND WRITING NEW SONGS. I’VE HAD SO MUCH MORE TIME THAN I USUALLY HAVE. SCHOOL IS HARD, DUDE”

ONES TO WATCH

PATRICIA LALOR

WORDS RHYS THOMAS

The prodigiously talented 14-year-old Irish singer-songwriter on Strats, scales, fitting songwriting around school and her DIY ethic

Patricia Lalor's career began, as is often the case for singer-songwriters in the digital age, with a YouTube channel. But that's where the similarities between Patricia and other up-and-coming guitarists end. After all, the Irish upstart hasn't even finished school yet but already boasts more than 150,000 subscribers to her channel, and counts Hozier as a fan of her music, which draws influence from Daughter, Radiohead, The Big Moon, Warpaint and others.

Born in Wexford, south-east Ireland, Patricia first picked up the guitar aged 10. She started making videos for her YouTube channel just a year later, initially of covers she was making in her bedroom. Now just 14 years old, when Patricia's not in school, she's self-producing dreamy EPs and editing the music videos that accompany them, which are directed by her photographer mum. "She has taken all the photos for the EPs, and shoots all my music videos," says Patricia. "We're a little team."

We caught up with this exciting young talent to learn about her background, how she's finding the spotlight, and what the future has in store for her.

Why did you first pick up a guitar?

"Basically, a few of my friends were getting lessons and it looked fun, so I just decided to have a go. I was into music but nothing that I listen to today. I had a big Nicki Minaj phase and listened to mainstream pop."

How did you learn to play?

"Diarmuid [@creaghstudios on Instagram] taught me how to play. I started off with a bunch of scales, which was annoying at the time but I'm grateful to have learnt them. Other than that, I built up knowledge by playing songs that had simple chords in, and built my learning from there."

You seem most comfortable with Strats and Teles. What is it you love about those guitars?

"I only play Strats and Teles because those two are the guitars I have! I really want a Charvel Pro-Mod but they are expensive. I wouldn't say no to a Jazzmaster either. That said, I'm very attached to the two guitars I have at the moment. Oh, and my Fender Newporter when I play acoustic. They're all I need. There's no specific reason why I use one guitar over another at the moment. It just depends on how I'm feeling."

Beyond the guitars, what equipment do you use?

"It's hard to say as I haven't done a gig or used an amp since lockdown. I feel like my sound has gotten a bit darker and sadder since then. Before, it was a lot more dreamy. I still love reverb, especially for slow songs. I do my best to avoid twangy, harsh sounds, because it doesn't fit the vibe I'm going for. I also often add phaser. My amp has built-in reverb and phaser.

"My only pedal is the Boss RC-30 loop pedal. I need to get back to using it because it's just so much fun for me to play around with and incorporate into songs. I might look into getting a wah pedal too but I'm all about keeping it simple on stage. As cool as pedals are, they kind of stress me out. I don't have enough practise with them."

On the EP, where are you taking influences from?

"I think whatever I listen to comes out while I'm writing. For this EP, I was heavily into Radiohead, Broken Social Scene, and Zero 7. It's hard to pinpoint the exact sound that has inspired me because those three bands are really different from each other. But they're the three bands I have on rotation, that I've been getting inspired by. *In Rainbows* is my favourite Radiohead album, with *The King Of Limbs* a close second."

How would you describe the sound of the EP?

"Alternative? Sad? Trippy? I'm not sure. I feel like everyone will have a different perspective on it – it's whatever you want it to be. All the songs were written at different times in different ways. I never sat down to write the EP. I wrote when I felt like writing. *Self Aware* was written and produced in about a day, which is crazy. But then there were several songs that didn't make it and songs that took ages to finish.

"I self-produce the songs but I'm not good yet. I had been using GarageBand on my Mac up until this EP. But now I use a mix of Logic and GarageBand."

You're 14. Do you still go to school?

"Yes. It's really hard to be honest, because it takes up so much of my time. Staying home during lockdown was the best thing for my music, and writing new songs. I've had so much more time than I usually have. School is hard, dude. Other than music, I enjoy my art lessons, not that I'm any good at it."

It's hard to escape what's going on in the world at the moment. How have you been coping with it?

"It's actually not been too bad. School closing has meant that I've been able to be home with my family and make music, which from a personal point of view has been great. Having so much time on my hands has been amazing. If anything, it's got to a point where I'm more scared of going back to normal life. I'm very used to this."

You've developed a significant following in such a short time. Have younger artists been looking to you for guidance?

"Yeah. It's crazy. I often get messages from people saying I've inspired them and asking for advice. It just blows my mind. Like, I'm just doing what I love. The people that support me are so nice. I don't deserve it."

How do you find filming and editing your own videos?

"I usually have a clear vision of what the song looks like, and I want to show everyone else that vision. Also, being in an environment where it's just me and my mum makes filming videos way more comfortable than working with a bunch of strangers would be. I've become so used to doing it this way that it's weird to imagine doing anything else.

"I love editing the films. I think the years of me playing with the Video Star app when I was little have paid off because I somewhat know how to edit now."

What are your plans for the future? Presumably music will be a big part of it...

"Hell yes. I'm in this for life, dude. I can't imagine doing anything else. I love music and writing music so much. I don't think that'll ever change."

Patricia's new EP *Do It Again* is out now. Visit youtube.com/PatriciaLalor for more

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

TYLER BRYANT & THE SHAKEDOWN PRESSURE

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Forged during the COVID-19 pandemic, Tyler Bryant & The Shakedown's fourth album is visceral, personal and might be their best to date

Before the lockdown, Tyler Bryant posted a demo online for a new song, *Crazy Days*, which featured Bryant's wife and Larkin Poe guitarist Rebecca Lovell, with the plan that it would be a teaser for a new EP. Fans loved the song however, and with the world locking down, plans for an EP quickly spiralled into a fourth long-player for the 29-year-old Texan guitarist.

In no time at all, four songs turned into almost 40. Produced by friend and collaborator Roger Alan Nichols, the resulting album *Pressure* is a reaction to an unprecedented time in our immediate history. Featuring Lovell alongside Blackberry Smoke's Charlie Starr, it's a candid and instinctive record full of emotion. This is lightning-in-a-bottle rock 'n' roll.

PRESSURE

"The riff was inspired by the time we spent on the road with Clutch. The riff ploughs. I love the subtle rhythmic changes to it at the end when it joins forces with the bass. We felt it would be the perfect way to kick off this record. I used 'The Judge' for it – it's a wacky Strat with a humbucker in the bridge that I got while serving jury duty, hence the name. I played it through an Orange Custom Shop 50 head into a Universal Audio Ox. We also mic'd up my old radio amp, which was made by Square Amps. The overdrive comes from a TB Drive."

HITCHHIKER

"I love Graham [Whitford]'s rhythm-guitar part when the band kicks in. He's playing with a lot of swagger, like one of those rock 'n' roll badasses that might've made your parents feel uneasy when you were young and impressionable. It's a simple part but the feel makes it. He was playing a 70s Telecaster that his brother had picked up from Carter Vintage Guitars here in Nashville. He was plugged into an old Oahu combo amp and more than likely using a Klon. Rockin' tone, indeed."

HOLDIN' MY BREATH

"Graham takes the first solo before the last chorus, and it's beautifully written. He was walking around my house, picking up a guitar in every room while he was working it out. When it came time to record it, he nailed the solo immediately. It was inspiring. He was using a Les Paul through a Marshall. My solo didn't come so easily. I wanted to do an improvised solo that had a specific emotion behind it. I did a bunch of passes before closing it down. I was angry at myself because I didn't feel I'd gotten what I wanted, despite my trusty cohorts all telling me that I had it. The next morning, I fired up 'The Judge' through a '65 Bassman head into one of those open-back 2x12 Orange cabs. I also ran my 100-watt Marshall head (1959 HW) through the Ox. The TB Drive was on, providing the perfect amount of sustain, and then *boom*, I got it. I don't know if I did that solo or it did me. It's probably my favourite on the record."

AUTOMATIC

"I love everything about the guitars in *Automatic*. You can hear that we spent time on the road with AC/DC and Airbourne. Watching those bands so many times made me want a song that had that unrelenting drum groove and a wound-up riff. I love the solo in this one too. The end of the solo takes inspiration from my own personal guitar hero Jeff Beck. I used 'Pinky 2' on this one, through the Orange and the Marshall, with the TB Drive. The usual suspects."

COASTIN'

"*Coastin'* was an accident. We'd hit a wall with a song we were working on and I just wanted to play some blues to get my head right. I was in the control room with my shell-pink Mule resonator and asked Caleb [Crosby] if he would jam through an idea with me on the kit before he called it a night and went home. I hit record just in case. I'm glad I did, 'cause we only played it once. It's sloppy and loose – just how I like my blues. These are licks I learnt from Muddy Waters, Johnny Winter and a whole bunch of unsung Texas heroes of mine. The Mule is the resonator you hear throughout the record. It inspired many songs that ended up on the album. It was running through the Square amp and a Roland Space Echo. We weren't in the same room; the doors were open, and the studio monitors were cranked. Everything was bleeding into everything. Caleb's first time hearing the song was putting it down. It was just a moment and it was one that I'm glad we didn't try to over-produce. It's the perfect way to end the record, if you ask me. Right back to the roots." G

Pressure is out 16 October on Snakefarm Records

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers

IDLES
Kill Them With Kindness (Live At Abbey Road)

Performed as part of a livestream at Abbey Road Studios ahead of their forthcoming third album *Ultra Mono*, this previously unreleased track is both visceral and emotive. With clattering guitars and bellowing vocals, this could be their best single from album three.

MOLLY TUTTLE
Mirrored Heart

Bluegrass singer and guitarist Molly Tuttle's recently released covers album of some of her favourite songs is her at her most vulnerable. This simple FKA Twigs cover features stripped-back guitar, vocals and harmonies but shows off Tuttle's wonderful abilities exquisitely.

GWENIFER RAYMOND
Eulogy for Dead French Composer

From her forthcoming LP *Strange Lights Over Garth Mountain*, Raymond's newest release is a haunting performance that drifts between 1920s blues and baroque guitar with ease. It's a genuine gem of instrumental guitar work.

BIG JOANIE
Cranes In The Sky

In their grungy, soulful rendition of Solange's hit single, London trio Big Joanie make use of reverberated guitars and a sombre bass drudge. Released as a seven-inch on Third Man Records, its apex is one of searing guitars and driving drums.

TEMPLES
Paraphernalia

The first single from Temples' second album for ATO Records sounds like a bust-up between ABBA and Daft Punk. Their signature muted bass tone remains, alongside fuzzed-out riffs, plus blinding keys and orchestration.

BIFFY CLYRO
WAP

Recorded as part of Radio 1's Live Lounge series, the Scottish alt-rock icons let rip on a surprising cover of Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's smash hit. Trading hip-hop beats for some solid drumming and tremolo-picked guitars, 'Wet Ass Biffy' is certainly something.

THIN LIZZY
Sugar Blues (Demo)

This previously unreleased version of a track heard on Thin Lizzy's 1981 LP *Chinatown* was recorded at Good Earth Studios in Soho, and features noticeably different guitar phrasing and lyrics to the beloved album version.

DOVES
Cathedral Of The Mind

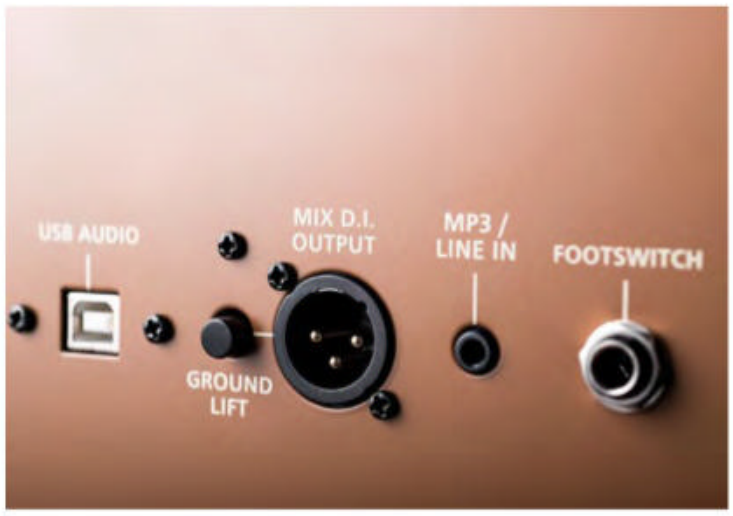
On their fifth album – and their first in a decade – Doves present themselves as a band that haven't felt the effects of that chasm in their recording output. Here, sultry arpeggiated guitars are interspersed with found sound and breakbeat drums.

KIRK FLETCHER
Ain't No Cure For The Downhearted

Part of his new album *My Blues Pathway*, a homage to the blues legends that shaped his career, Kirk Fletcher's latest single is awash with the sounds of the Fender Strat, as well as those of icons Stevie Ray Vaughan and Albert King.

JULIAN LAGE & CHRIS ELDRIDGE
Cattle In The Cane (Live)

A beautiful acoustic rendition of a track from the duo's 2013 EP *Close To Picture*, this track was recorded at home, and is a wonderful example of Lage's largely under-represented rhythm chops and Eldridge's impeccable gypsy jazz playing.



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Blackstar Amplification has long been a staple of the electric guitar amp world but at NAMM 2020 the British brand ventured into the acoustic world with the Sonnet series – a pair of smart, hugely versatile that sound superb.

The Sonnet 60 is a twin-channel amp, which means you can run two input sources through it, rather than separate gain stages. Channel one has a jack input and an independent gain knob, as well as a three-band EQ and a reverb knob. Channel two features a combination jack/XLR input and forgoes the three-band EQ in favour of low and high knobs. Both channels boast a Shape switch for mid-scooping, too.

Perfect for acoustic players and singer-songwriters alike, this strong performer is as adept at dealing with the spiky transients of piezo systems as it is at offering warmth and detail when using something like an L-5.

To enter our competition to win this sensational amp, simply answer the question below. Good luck!

Which acclaimed guitarist was the Sonnet 60 designed in collaboration with?

A) Jon Gomm **B)** Tommy Emmanuel **C)** Andy McKee

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THURS

AS THE FORMER SONIC YOUTH GUITARIST REVEALS HIS NEW SOLO ALBUM, WE CATCH UP WITH 62-YEAR-OLD NOISE PIONEER TO TALK WEIRD TUNINGS, WRITING "STRAIGHT-UP POP SONGS", HOW HE'S LEARNT TO BE A BAND LEADER, AND WHY HE CAN'T SEPARATE HIS SONGS FROM THE GUITARS HE RECORDED THEM WITH

THE Guitar INTERVIEW

TONE

WORDS HUW BAINES

PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

"I'M IN A PLACE WHERE I CAN BE CREATIVE WITHOUT THE ANXIETY OF HAVING TO GO OUT AND WORK, YET THE ONLY REAL REVENUE I HAVE IS FROM GOING OUT AND WORKING"

If you'd used as many unconventional tunings as Thurston has over the years, you'd need reminding too...

If you're a normal person with a normal job and a normal life, you probably haven't spent much time doing the things Thurston Moore spends his time doing – until recently. Of late the pre-eminent co-founder of Sonic Youth, terroriser of Jazzmasters and walking building block of modern indie-rock has been spending a lot of time between four walls in his adopted home of London, with a guitar on his lap and one eye on the spread of COVID-19.

"I've loved working on guitar in the privacy of my flat, knowing that I had all these days ahead of me to do that," he says. "But, psychologically, it's a conflict. I'm in a place where I can be creative without the anxiety of having to go out and work, yet the only real revenue I have is from going out and working. I enjoy being in one place but it comes with this situation where people are susceptible to getting fatally ill on a scale that it's almost too strange to believe. You'd have to be an NHS caregiver to see the reality of it."

Moore's new solo record *By The Fire* is intended as a balm of sorts. Let's not pretend that it's prophetic or that it's the perfect record for these imperfect times but, close to its heart, there's a relevant maxim cribbed from avant-jazz musician Albert Ayler, which reads: "Music is the healing force of the universe". Recorded pre-lockdown, with a few overdubs captured once the world had shifted, Moore can see the uncertainty and anger of the time in the manner he tailored the finished album as much as any individual song.

"The pandemic and the uprising of rage in the US because of the nefarious leadership there informed the way the record was sequenced," says Moore. "The title certainly references that. I wanted it to be about people communicating in a really primal way – sitting around the fire telling stories but also what fire denotes when people take to the streets; they light fires to call attention to oppression. Records are always made in the moment, even if the songs are part of your historical language. They're always about what's happening now."

By The Fire is a literate reading of Moore's ambitions and crutches. Backed up by My Bloody Valentine's Debbie Googe on bass, guitarist James Sedwards, Jon Leidecker on electronics, lyricist Radieux Radio and Sonic Youth's Steve Shelley in a drumming job-share with Jem Doulton, he weaves meditative, occasionally meandering guitar instrumentals with immediate and hooky indie-rock songs such as *Hashish*, which sounds like the grizzled sibling of Sonic Youth's *Sunday*.

"The album starts out very joyful, with proper, straight-up pop-rock songs," says Moore. "I wanted the trajectory to at least go through this period where it gets a bit more complicated. The final piece, *Venus*, is about sounds coming together through a structure. The guitars go through a very specific sequence of notes and the only improvisational part is my cueing.

"It's by feel: the high sixth string, starting on the second fret and moving all the way up to the top of the neck, then repeating that sequence on the next-lowest string. I wanted to have this piece that was all about these continuing ascensions and returns, which encapsulated what was happening musically with all these different ideas. It's sort of like,'Here's the catalogue of notes used on this record.'"

HITTING RESET

Moore has been undertaking expeditions like this for 40 years. Born in Coral Gables, Florida in 1958 and largely raised in Bethel, Connecticut, he moved to New York in the late 1970s with little but a white Stratocaster – passed down from his older brother – a few Hendrix moves in hand, and *Louie Louie* still ringing in his ears. The move came not a moment too soon, because in Thurston Moore's world, punk rock was about to smash the reset button on everything.

The arrival of punk immediately drew a line in the sand between before and after that first powerchord cleaved its way through young Moore's brain. He saw his own tall, unwieldy frame reflected back at him in the form of Joey Ramone and felt the future in the electro mayhem of Suicide. His Zappa and Zeppelin records would moulder in his mother's basement as he sought out things that were new, newer, newest. In the city, he found all that on tap, roving out from his apartment amid the gonzo weirdness of the Lower East Side as punk begat new wave, no-wave spat back and the hardcore genre windmilled its way into the conversation.

"The documents were just so incredible," says Moore, "and you could actually buy a seven-inch and a fanzine and not suffer too much from it. Going to a guitar store was all about gawking, maybe playing, and then walking out without anything to show for it. Unless you had deep pockets, it was an excursion in window shopping. To me, the records were what I was getting my guitar education from anyway. You'd hear the first Scritti Politti seven-inch and it was just so odd. You'd hear the Slits album and how it was produced by Dennis Bovell. One after the other, from '77 through to like '81, it was relentless."

Into this maelstrom came the avant-garde guitar orchestras moulded and manipulated by composers Glenn Branca and Rhys Chatham. Moore ate up the punishing, confrontational volume of the music, studied their grand plans to build sounds that no-one had heard before, and channelled these ideas of perpetual motion and experimentation into his contributions to a new band called Sonic Youth.

Moore's gold 1959 Jazzmaster was a gift from Patti Smith after Sonic Youth's gear was stolen in 1999. "It happens to the best of us," says Thurston of the heist

"I remember when The Clash first played New York after their second album," says Moore. "They didn't play CBGB or Max's Kansas City. They played at this big place, the Palladium. Everybody in our world went to that gig. They came out and just tore the roof off the place. About six months later, they came back again and you know what? It wasn't the same, because so much had happened since – new ideas, new records and new bands. There was such an amazing amount of radical things happening that The Clash at the Palladium part two sounded a little too traditional. I was like, 'I'm gonna go see A Certain Ratio because that's more interesting right now.' It was an amazing time. Our band started in the thick of that."

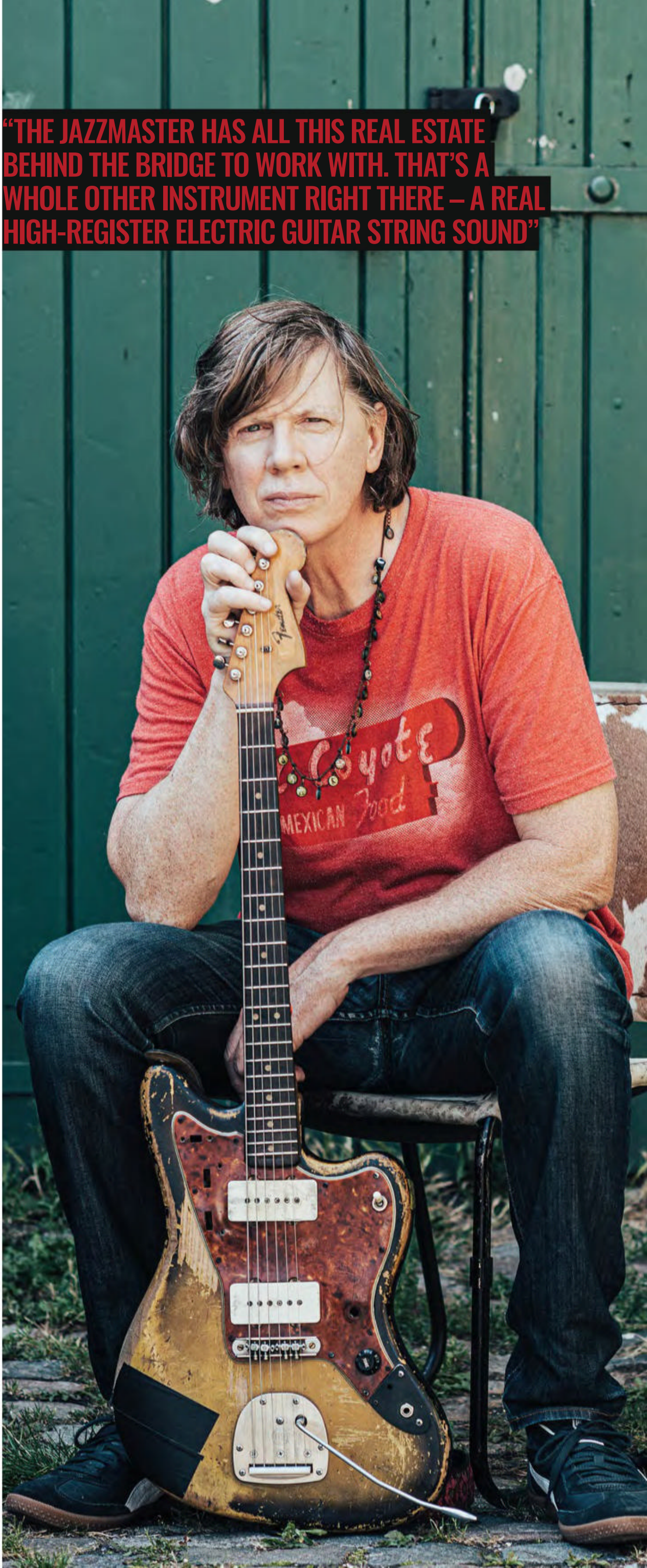
LEADING MAN

On *By The Fire*, the instincts that Moore honed during the anything-goes experimentation of the late 1970s and early 1980s are still relevant. What has changed is the dynamic between Moore and his bandmates. He is a bandleader here in a manner that he never was during Sonic Youth's tenure, when his interjections were only one part of the puzzle alongside those emanating from the powerful creative minds of bassist Kim Gordon and guitarist Lee Ranaldo.

Their bold brand of art-school anthemics, roiling dissonance and searing cool – which spanned 15 albums, at least five of which qualify as sacred indie-rock texts – was always a collage. Since Sonic Youth's passing in 2011, with the acrimonious end of Moore and Gordon's marriage at its heart, he has sought to foster collaborations that feel different.

"From the outset, Sonic Youth was a democratic concern," he says. "As most young bands are and should be, it was people coming together to create the sum of their parts. Sometimes it's magical, from The Beatles to the Pistols. Some people have stronger egos than others but it's always about the band. The band is writing the songs as opposed to one chief songwriter. That's what Sonic Youth always was. On all of the publishing, all the songwriting is, 'All songs by Sonic Youth'. It doesn't matter who wrote the lyrics, who brought the idea in. It's in the forum of Sonic Youth. I didn't feel like I needed to experience that again."

His approach isn't pernickety, though. It's still about the songs. "I don't dictate to Deb Googe what to play on bass," says Moore. "She's a formidable player. I want her to play with me because of how she writes her own lines. At first James was playing in unison with me but I realised I was underselling him. I can't play lead guitar in his manner – it's technique-led traditional playing.



“THE JAZZMASTER HAS ALL THIS REAL ESTATE BEHIND THE BRIDGE TO WORK WITH. THAT’S A WHOLE OTHER INSTRUMENT RIGHT THERE – A REAL HIGH-REGISTER ELECTRIC GUITAR STRING SOUND”

He plays like that effortlessly. But for him it’s a challenge to work in alternate tunings, and he’s risen to the occasion.

“We’ve grown into hearing each other. I think he feels a little bit more comfortable with moving away from just trying to acknowledge what I’m doing, and that comes with time, spending years together on the road. You can hear that camaraderie in these pieces. It’s quite different to the relationship I had with Lee [Ranaldo] as a guitar player. That can’t be replicated, not that I’d want to replicate it. It was too personal. Lee and I spent 30 years growing up together.”

This sunburst Jazzmaster was originally a backup bought in the Sonic Youth days, before becoming the new 'Excalibur' after his old number one was stolen

While Moore describes Sedwards' key influences as "equal value Led Zeppelin and The Fall", he's also a Sonic Youth fan, which meant that he knew alternate tunings were a big part of the gig from the get-go – the sight of Moore's hand on a tuning peg has come to mean the same thing as another guitarist working their way into the meat of a solo. As with so many elements of that New York punk scene, Sonic Youth's fascination with tunings – and taking the occasional power drill to their pickups – sprang from a place that balanced creative abandon with cold, hard facts: their gear was pawn-shop junk.

"When I first saw Rhys Chatham and Glenn Branca, I didn't know they were playing alternate tunings," says Moore. "It wasn't really until I started playing with them that I was like, 'Okay, this guitar is all high E strings and this one is all G strings – you're making one massive guitar'. That was very informative and really exciting. When Sonic Youth started, the first guitars we had were so cheap and horrible that they sounded really terrible in traditional tunings. But they sounded great when you put a drumstick underneath the 12th fret to create this kind of noded guitar that you could play either end of.

"IF A SONIC YOUTH GUITAR GOES ON THE MARKET, COMPLETELY GUTTED AND REWIRED, THEY BECOME THESE VERY PERSONALISED, ICONIC ITEMS. IT'S A SONIC YOUTH GUITAR. WHOEVER RIPPED THEM OFF, THEY COULD TAKE THEM TO A GUITAR STORE AND THEY'D PROBABLY LOOK AT THEM AND GO, 'THESE GUITARS AREN'T WORTH ANYTHING!'"

"For the economics of it all, I can't now have a dozen tunings on a record and go out and have a dozen guitars on the road. In the 1990s, when we had such a high profile, Sonic Youth toured in a way that allowed us to travel with two dozen guitars, so we could write in any tuning and your tech would pass you a guitar for it. I don't have that kind of comfort zone or privilege anymore."

JAZZ MASTERS

Sonic Youth's guitar-slingers played a huge part in elevating the Fender Jazzmaster to iconic status, and Moore and Ranaldo's dealings with this soon-to-be symbol of alt-guitar cool began in the mid-1980s. Their sideline in modding the guitars – ripping out electronics, sacrificing switches and, in Ranaldo's case, adding Tele Deluxe pickups to his 'Jazzblaster' – began immediately afterwards. Sonic Youth's guitars quickly became good for nothing except playing Sonic Youth songs. It is one of the most symbiotic relationships between musicians and instruments in rock history.

"The charity shop guitars were just falling apart," says Moore. "Their shelf-life was really limited, especially with the way we were treating them.

Thurston's sunburst Electric XII was used to add extra experimental colour to the songs on *By The Fire*

As soon as we had a little coin, I remember going up to 48th Street in Manhattan, where Manny's Music and all these iconic stores were. We were stepping it up a bit but not too much. Lee pointed at a Jazzmaster and went, 'That's the kind of guitar [Television's] Tom Verlaine uses'. That was a selling point right there.

"Nobody was playing Jazzmasters on the scene at the time. We got a few for next to nothing. They were considered a country and western guitar or some old fogey 1950s jazz guitar. We began modding them when we realised we were hitting these unnecessary switches. We were like, 'Man, all we need is a toggle switch between the two pickups and a volume knob. We'll keep the tone knob on its brightest end'. That was it. We started digging out all the electronics and soldering them back together again."

In Sonic Youth's wake, with waves also made by guitarists including J Mascis of Dinosaur Jr and Kevin Shields of My Bloody Valentine, the Jazzmaster became a fixture of indie-rock.

"It was basically a matter of economics that we chose that guitar," says Moore. "But the aspects of it were so intrinsic to what we were interested in. We were already noding guitars, and the fact that the Jazzmaster had all this real estate behind the bridge to work with was really good. That's a whole other instrument right there – a real high-register electric guitar string sound. I have a long reach so the Jazzmaster fits my body like no other guitar. There's nothing else I feel as comfortable with."

COMFORT ZONES

It should come as no surprise, then, that Moore and Sedwards both leaned heavily on Jazzmasters during their work on *By The Fire*. Moore's sunburst model was acquired in Sonic Youth's final throes as a backup before stepping up when the band's gear was stolen. "It has become what the previous Jazzmaster was," says Moore. "In the words of Sunburned Hand Of The Man founder John Moloney, 'Excalibur!'"

Sedwards, meanwhile, plays a guitar that is almost as old as Jazzmasters come. The gold '59 model also tumbled into Moore's possession after Sonic Youth were robbed in a semi-legendary incident in Orange County, California in 1999 (several of the guitars stolen in the heist have been recovered since, largely thanks to diligent fans). "It was a gift from Patti Smith in sympathy, because they had been ripped off as well at some point," says Moore. "It happens to the best of us. That guitar is really cherished.

"If a Sonic Youth guitar goes on the market, completely gutted and rewired, they become these very personalised, iconic items," he adds. "It's a Sonic Youth guitar. Whoever ripped them off, they could take them to a guitar store and they'd probably look at them and go, 'These guitars aren't worth anything!' I hope they're starting some noise-rock groups."

Another curio in Moore's collection is his sunburst Fender Electric XII. It has ties to a piece commissioned by the Barbican in London, which provides added context for *By The Fire*'s extended workouts, while linking back to Moore's earliest days in experimental music. Next to the sunnier side of his new record, this nebulous composition (which was released as part of Moore's *Spirit Counsel* box set in 2019) recalls Branca and Chatham as much as it speaks of his place as an indie-rock sage who will always be down to get improvisational.

It underlines the fact that Moore's guitars are often part of the music: from tunings through to the

Moore has a deep connection with each of his well-used, heavily modded instruments, to the point where a song won’t sound right to him if he’s having to use the ‘wrong’ guitar for the job

feedback screaming out of his amp. Living in London, he has collaborated with a host of experienced, daring free-improv musicians, sometimes adapting his style to offer a febrile, unpredictable noise counterpoint. The experience has become part of his make up as a player.

“Knowing you can present feedback as a musical gesture is something that became a big part of Sonic Youth’s songwriting at some point,” he says. “That, to me, is as good as any chord run or blues scale. It can have a life of its own and you’re a bit of a lion-tamer. I can manipulate the neck and create things that way. You can engage the guitar physically with the amp, creating slight bends without destroying everything.

“I don’t know if I ever see the guitar as a tool. When I go to a radio station and they want me to play a song, it’s almost impossible. The songs are about the guitars being played. Even if they have some hired Jazzmaster, the song is going to suffer because of that. It won’t sound right. I have a personal relationship with the guitars I play. I never see them as interchangeable.” G

By The Fire is out now through the Daydream Library

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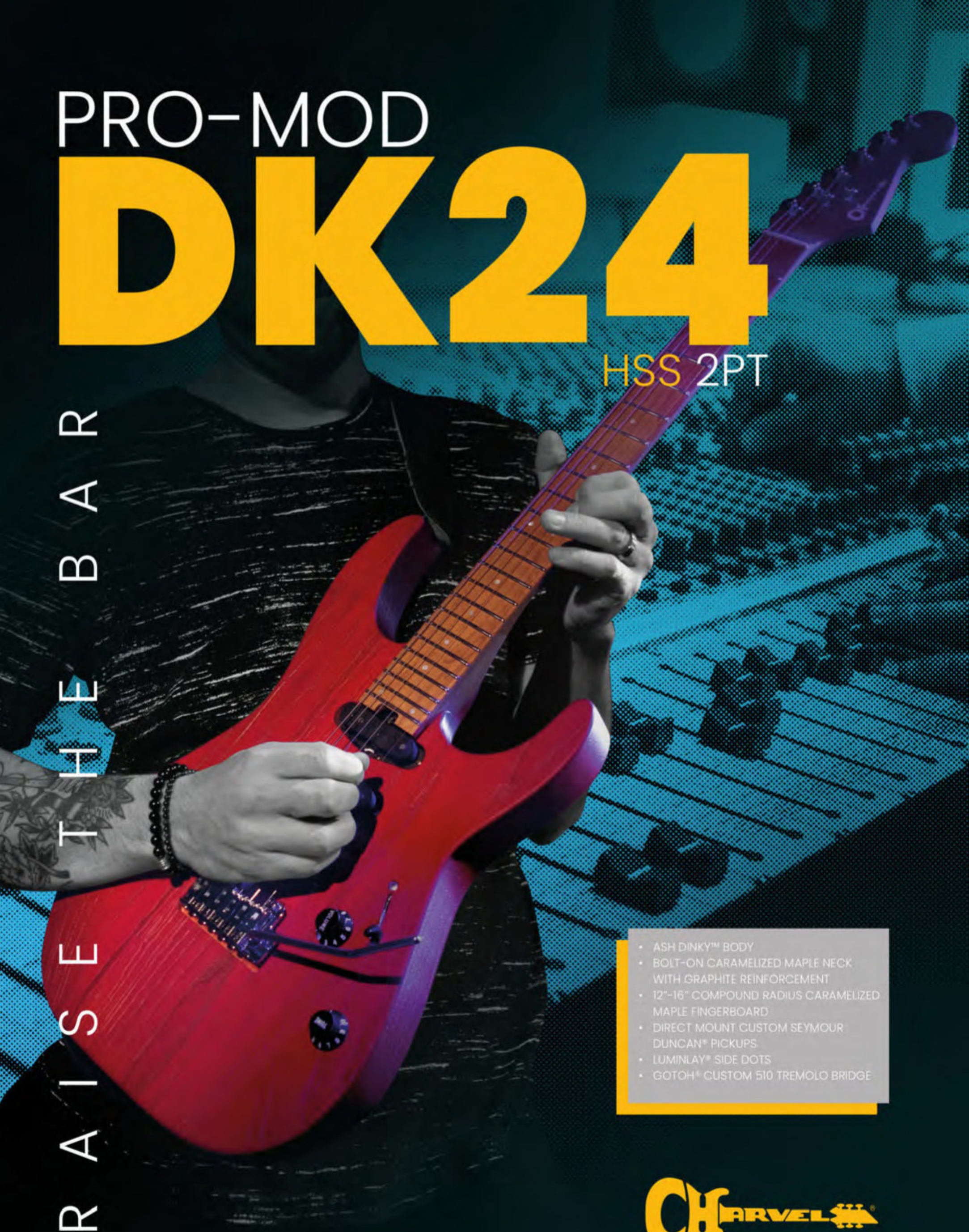

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THEORY LESSON

Lindsay Ell tells all: the challenges of recording new album *Heart Theory* after the world shut down midway through production, how producer Dann Huff became her guitar coach, and what 2020 can teach us all

WORDS MICHAEL LEONARD **PHOTOGRAPHY** TAYLOR KELLY

It's often said that you should never meet your heroes. But if Lindsay Ell hadn't, her entire career might have been very different. The pop-country blues-rock (that's right!) singer-guitarist was discovered in her teens by fellow Canadian Randy Bachman of The Guess Who and Bachman-Turner Overdrive, who produced her early recordings. By the time Ell was in her twenties, she'd shared the stage with Buddy Guy. After moving to Nashville via LA, she was mentored by Kristian Bush of country superstar duo Sugarland, who produced her first major album *The Project*. She's since toured with Keith Urban and traded live chops with Billy Gibbons. Oh, and Brad Paisley built her a relic'd Strat.

For her latest release, *Heart Theory*, Ell has moved up a league to work with award-winning producer Dann Huff. If you judge a person by the company they keep, Lindsay Ell is already an A-lister.

Heart Theory is mostly breezy modern crossover country with some superb bluesy playing from Ell. But it's also a deeper concept record based around the stages-of-grief psychology model, with ballads that touch on a troubled past. "Though some of the subject matter is tough," says Ell, "I didn't want to write a depressing album. It's full of hope. I want people to dance!" Today, though, Ell is keen to talk guitars and gear, something that's obsessed her since she was just eight years old.

Dann Huff's track record is pretty faultless. How does he work?

"I've wanted to work with Dann ever since I moved to Nashville, I'm not going to lie. I'm grateful that it took a while to happen though, because this is a different record to what I would've made three years ago with him. But now that I know a little bit more about who I am, I think it made sense.

"I was so nervous the first session we had. I was literally shaking. Here's a man who's played guitar on Michael Jackson records, on Madonna records – oh my God, it's Dan Huff! But he was super-nice. After the first day, he made me feel like I could do anything. He was shouting, 'We're going to make the best record! It's going to have the best guitar solos! It's going to be incredible!' He was so empowering.

Lindsay hand-painted a Strat for each of the 12 songs on her label debut *The Project*, including the example on the previous spread, nicknamed Betty Van Halen. Later on, Fender sent her an American Professional Series with a replica of her own paint job (above), to take on the road

On the second day I went in there, he said, 'Lindsay, for a debut guitar player (for him) you really inspired me'. I call him my guitar coach now. I never want to play another solo without asking Dann, 'So what do you think?!'"

Would you say he's changed the way you play guitar?

"He didn't force me in any direction. He was just very good at listening and then guiding me. When I solo, it can sometimes be a case of me just blazing away with a lot of improvisation. But he was so good at picking out the licks or phrases that I should focus on, or sometimes move. Sometimes it was as simple as changing the last note of a solo, which made all the difference. But it still totally felt like me, and he had such a good ear for that."

Did Dann bring his own production tricks and gear that you have learnt from?

"Dann is well known as the Tone Master and, at first, I probably tried overly hard to impress him. I had all my pedals and I'd been working on as many new tones as I could. But the whole thing ended up way more simple than I could've ever imagined. The whole album is mostly just one guitar and one amp."

That might not be what people expect.

"Oh, he got really involved, believe me. There were times on the solos where he was my live guitar tech: he was there by the gain knob as I was playing, giving me an extra boost as I went! Having Dann Huff as your guitar tech, that's like the coolest thing *ever*.

"But Dann was insistent on that simplicity of sound. He kept telling me, 'I only really know how to do a few things but I know how to do them *really* well'. And you can't argue with that.

"His guidance was really special. The studio can be quite an intimidating environment. The pressure to come up with something that will be set in concrete can be so hard. It's so different from playing live. So I did learn that what I played had to be a lot more intentional. Some people record as if they're playing a live show but, to me, what Dann helped me do is the sign of a real producer. Everyone in Nashville says, 'Dann Huff is just the *best*'. I always knew that. But now I know *why*."

It's almost inevitable in 2020: did the situation with COVID-19 affect this album?

"Yeah. The last day of band-tracking was the day before quarantine in Nashville. It was a weird day.

Things were going so well but we had the TV news on in the studio, and we all just had to go home.

"But I have a little home studio in my house and I carried on from there. A lot of the final vocals were recorded there. I sent Dann the files, and he mixed them at his house – of course, he has a really nice home studio.

"But for the guitar parts, I was like, 'How am I going to record these remotely – without my guitar coach there?' But we made it work. We did a lot of FaceTime, talking about each solo. The craziest thing was that the amps I'd been using were now at his house. So I basically recorded my solos through Guitar Rig and sent him the DI'd recording. Then he re-amped them with his Bogner and Matchless.

"We both thought, 'Yeah, this'll work. It will be just like I'm sitting there playing!' But that was *not* the case. There was one day where poor Dann had to spend seven hours just working out how to get the DI to sound like the sound we'd got earlier. I'm not going to say what's what but I don't think you can tell which solos and licks were recorded with me in the studio and which were me in my little room when the amps were at Dann's. It was, for sure, an interesting process."

"THE LAST DAY OF BAND-TRACKING WAS THE DAY BEFORE QUARANTINE IN NASHVILLE. IT WAS A WEIRD DAY. THINGS WERE GOING SO WELL BUT WE ALL JUST HAD TO GO HOME"

Is that home studio of yours where you've been doing your *Living wEll* YouTube videos, in which you speak to other Nashville artists in lockdown?

"It sure is! It's not a big space and it doesn't have any meaningful sound-proofing, so I had to improvise a little. I brought my spare mattress into the studio – that's like foam, right? That'll absorb any unwanted reverberation on the vocals? I ended up recording a lot of vocals for this album singing right up next to a dragged-in mattress. Very glamorous!"

It sounds like it's all been a huge, unexpected learning process.

"It has been. With the whole COVID-19 thing and the racial crisis going on, it feels like 2020 is really a year for us all to start re-evaluating our priorities. It seems insignificant for me to even complain that recording my album was a bit tricky. But even from my own tiny perspective, I feel positive. I think 2020 is teaching us lots of things: how to slow down a bit,

Raising Ell

Although she sits broadly in a 'new country' landscape, Lindsay's five early inspirations are all rooted in the blues

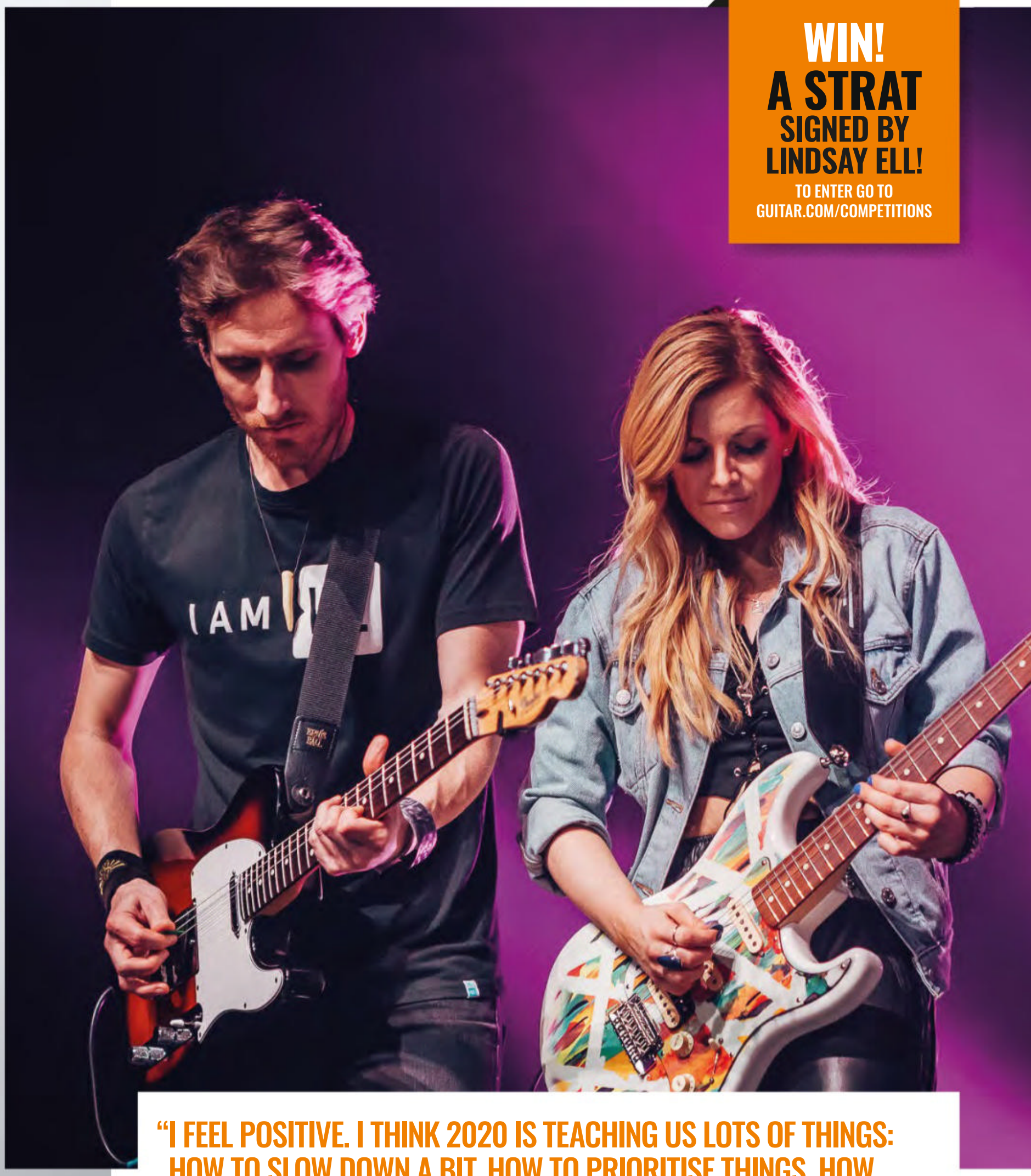
Jimi Hendrix
"Randy Bachman used to play me Jimi Hendrix records all the time. He was also really into Lenny Breau and jazz guys like that. And although I *knew* about Hendrix back then, I'd never really listened to him properly and when I did – and I still do – he just amazes me. His playing is so inventive. His chords are extraordinary. It still sounds out of this world. If I'm in a self-inflicted box, playing wise, listening to Jimi Hendrix will take me somewhere else."

Eric Clapton
"I really love Eric's phrasing, in particular his vibrato. When I started really soloing, some people said to me, 'Oh, you play your vibrato like Clapton'. I was like, 'Do I?' But they're right. That way of taking your thumb off the back of the neck and having your fretting finger pivot – I can't actually play vibrato any other way. But I guess I learnt that from Clapton."

Stevie Ray Vaughan
"The perfect example of how the guitar can be like an extension of your body, to me. He was such a physical player at times with that picking action, yet he could then ease back into the most delicate of phrases too. I still watch his videos a lot."

Derek Trucks
"What a *sound*. Some of his solos literally reduce me to tears. I love the idea of a guitar solo being lyrics to a song that aren't written, and if there's one player I could listen to all day and feel inspired by, it's Derek Trucks."

Bonnie Raitt
"There's any number of people like Buddy Guy, Duane Allman and so on that I could choose. But I'm going to include a woman and it's Bonnie Raitt. Her slide playing is fantastic, obviously. But I also love how she just commands the stage. *I Can't Make You Love Me* is my favourite song of all time too. If I can get anywhere near having the impact and command of Bonnie Raitt, then I'm definitely going in the right direction."



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"I FEEL POSITIVE. I THINK 2020 IS TEACHING US LOTS OF THINGS: HOW TO SLOW DOWN A BIT, HOW TO PRIORITISE THINGS, HOW TO DO OUR JOBS MORE EFFICIENTLY"

how to prioritise things, how to do our jobs more efficiently. Like, I was talking with my office teams the other day – in Nashville, in LA, in London and in Australia, all in one day on Zoom. Now, we could have done that easily before but for some reason we never did. We were just sending emails that took ages to answer! Now, weirdly, I feel more connected to my teams than ever. Who knew it would take the world getting a little sick for us to feel some of these things?"

You're an incessant tourer though. You must have missed that?

"Oh, the most. We've done some live internet shows but it's not the same. I was on tour for 280 days last year. I love playing live. I'm having to be patient for that to return. But I've had so much more time, and that's been amazing. Quarantine has felt really busy. There's been a lot of guitar practise instead of shows. But I could always do with more, let's be real!" G

***Heart Theory* is out now on Stoney Creek Records**

THE ULTIMATE COUNTRY GUITAR LESSON

Always wanted to dazzle your audience by throwing some scorching country licks into your repertoire but don't know where to start? With the help of solo artist and Nashville gun for hire David Henriksson, we're here to show you the ropes and help you inject some Broadway mojo into your guitar playing

WORDS DAVID HENRIKSSON

Hello and welcome. My name is David Henriksson and I'll be your guide as we get to grips with the basics of country guitar playing. But before we get started, you should know a little about me. In my native Sweden, I studied for a bachelor's degree in electric guitar teaching, and I've always really enjoyed helping other guitar players to understand their instrument on a deeper level. But I also had another dream: Music City.

I've always loved country guitar. In July 2017, I decided to pack up my life, move to Nashville and try to make it as a session guitar player in the most competitive and demanding environment on the planet. Shortly after arriving, I scored a crazy opportunity for a newcomer: an audition for legendary country singer Tracy Lawrence, who has sold 14 million albums and has 18 Billboard No.1 singles.

I landed the gig and, fewer than two months after arriving in Music City, I hit the road with Tracy. During my 17 months of touring, I had the honour of playing with 11 other Billboard-topping country artists, including superstar Luke Combs, as well as three Grammy winners. I also performed at iconic venues such as the Grand Ole Opry and the Ryman Auditorium, appeared on national TV and played festivals in front of crowds of 30,000 people. My time in Nashville also gave me the opportunity to befriend some of my heroes, such as Brent Mason, Vince Gill and Guthrie Trapp. I also had a fun year on the road with up-and-coming country rocker Kyle Daniel in 2019. I returned home to Sweden shortly before the pandemic hit but what I learnt in Nashville will stay with me forever – and makes me well suited to initiate you into this most exciting style of guitar.

The first country guitar I remember hearing was Albert Lee's playing on Dave Edmunds' *Sweet Little Lisa*. I was about 10 years old and blown away. There were a few elements that I recognised already and that I still consider incredibly important ingredients to country guitar: open-string licks, doublestops, pedal-steel-inspired bends and, of course, hybrid picking and chicken pickin'. This guide is broken down into five distinct lessons, through which we'll master the fundamentals one by one before putting everything all together. In the final part, we'll take on two full solos: one over a traditional country shuffle and another with a country-rock flavour. To hear the examples and their backing tracks, head to the link below. Let's get started!

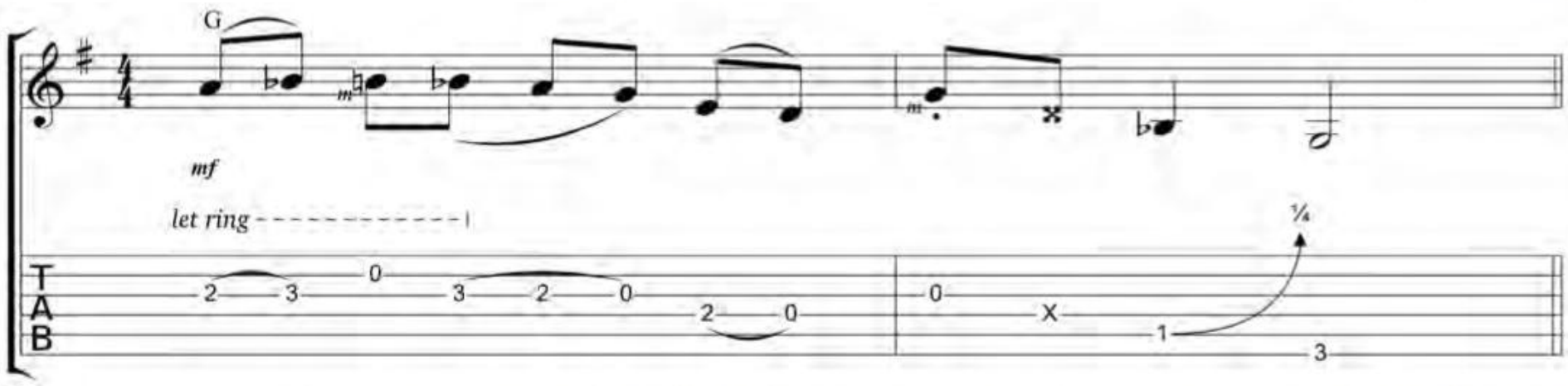
Visit bit.ly/guitar386 for full audio examples
For best results on mobile, download the free BandLab app

PART 1 THE BEDROCK

Let's begin with the basics. The use of hybrid picking is present throughout this series but, to get us in the country mood, our first lesson is a whirlwind tour of open-string licks, doublestops and steel bends. The goal here is to put the following techniques, sounds and concepts together before eventually tackling the dual solos in part five. But first, it's time to learn the ropes.

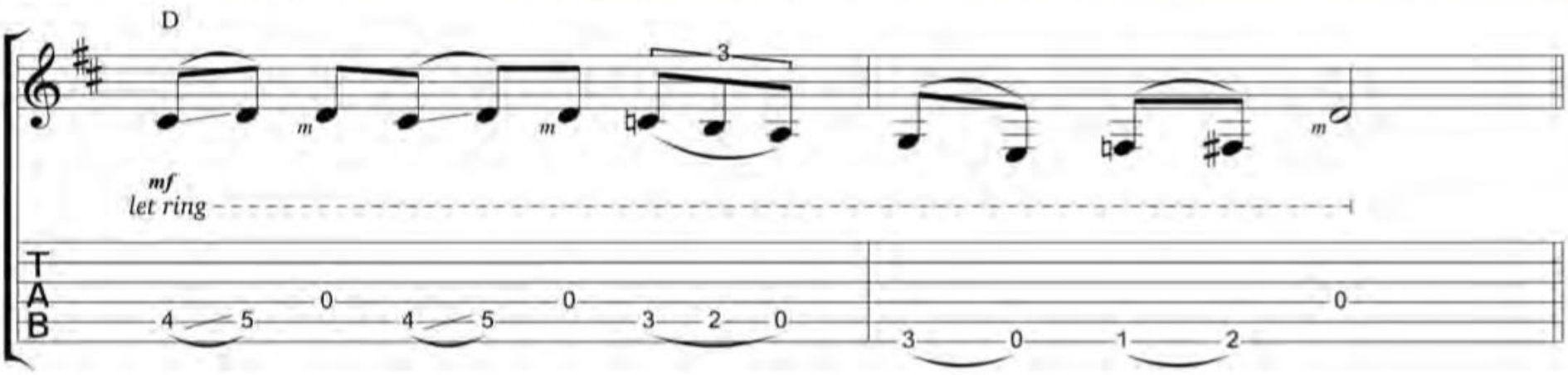
EXAMPLE 1 KEY OF G

Here's a lick played in the open position. We're mostly using the G major pentatonic scale but also add the minor third as a chromatic passing tone. If you're playing with a pick, I'd recommend using your middle finger every time you switch to a *higher* string – in this example, the B note in bar 1 and the G note at the beginning of bar 2. This is indicated by the *m* next to the third note of bar one and the first of bar two below. Try to get the B♭ and B notes in the first bar to ring into each other to create an interesting dissonance.



EXAMPLE 2 KEY OF D

This example starts on the A string before sliding into the root from the major seventh and then repeating the root note on the D string. Again, you can see it's indicated when you should use your middle finger here. These three notes are then repeated to create an effective rhythmic displacement. Accentuate the first note in each group for an even greater effect. Continue with some descending pull-offs from the flat seventh to the fifth on the A string, the chromatic line targeting the major third on the low E string and then end with the open D.

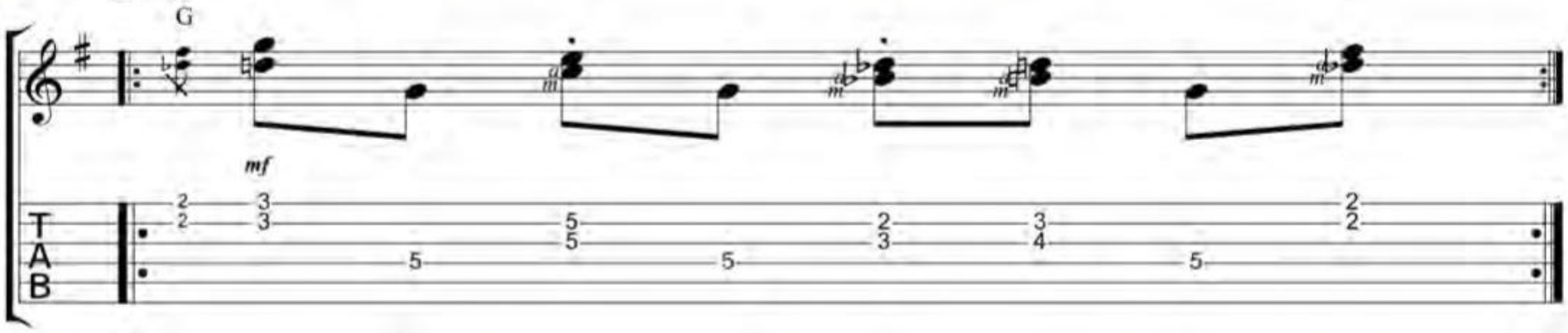


EXAMPLE 3 KEY OF A

This lick combines the major pentatonic and the blues scale, which gives our palette both the minor *and* major third. While this half-step rub is often used to create a bluesy effect, here it puts us closer to that blistering cousin of the country-guitar style: bluegrass guitar. Try to get as many of the notes as possible to ring into each other. To make this easier, I recommend not hooking your thumb around the guitar neck but instead going for more of a classical-guitar thumb position, in the middle of the back of the neck. There are a lot of open strings here.

EXAMPLE 4 KEY OF G

After those open-string ideas, let's move on to another hugely important element of country guitar: doublestops. This is a repetitive lick based around the E shape of the G chord, and it's easy to move between different keys. Begin by sliding into the fifth and root from a half step below. Pluck these strings with your middle and ring fingers. All the doublestops in this example should be played with these two fingers. Don't be afraid to grab the strings from underneath and give them a lot of attack, which will enhance the chicken-pickin' character of this lick. Experiment with giving the C and E, and the B♭ and D♭ doublestops a short staccato feel to lend the lick a more aggressive flavour. Alternatively, make them more legato for a smoother sound.



EXAMPLE 5 KEY OF E

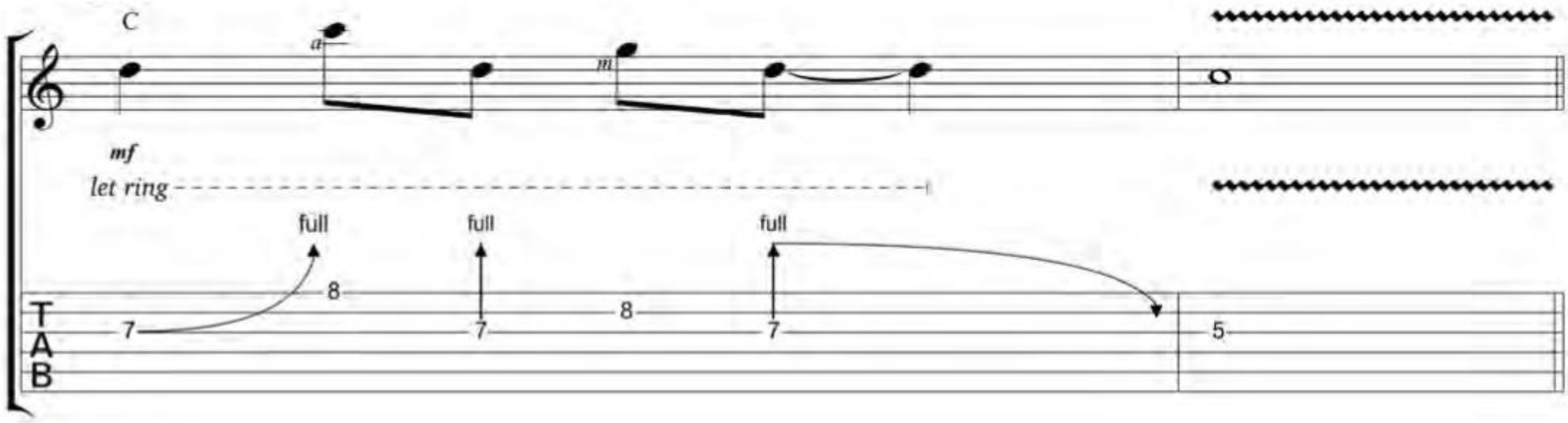
The first half of this example outlines a transition from E to A. Play parallel thirds and start from the root and major third of the E chord before ascending through the scale. Add some chromaticism with the G and B♭ doublestops on beat 3 before the G♯ and B (the third and fifth of the E chord) lead you perfectly into the A and C♯ (the root and third of the A chord). The second half of the lick features the same notes but with inverted intervals, now played as sixths. This gives things a more open sound. Experiment with note length to give these licks different degrees of bounce.

EXAMPLE 6 KEY OF A

Now let's add a bluesy doublestop lick to our bag of tricks. This is based around the A blues scale in the open position, with the addition of the major third. I like to give the first doublestop a heavy accent and play the rest of the phrase more legato. By replacing the C♯ on beat 3 with a B, you can employ this idea over Am too. Give it a go. Both of these work wonderfully well as short but distinctive ending licks.

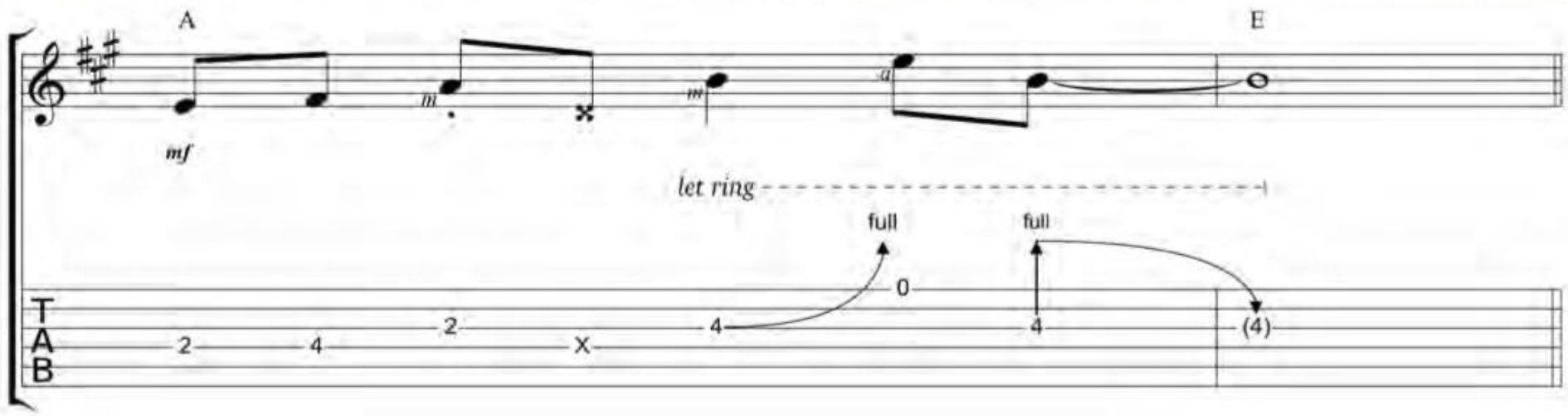
EXAMPLE 7 KEY OF C

Let's move on to our third category, pedal-steel-inspired bends! Remember to use support fingers when bending. We're going to outline a major triad here. Start by bending from the major second-third and using your pinky to barre the 8th fret on the two highest strings. The trickiest thing here is to keep the bent G string in tune, which might require some additional attention as you learn the lick, before your muscle memory takes over. This phrase should have a smooth vibe. Don't pluck too hard. Instead, try to keep the attack gentle and let the harmonic strength of the triad and the major second-third bend be the main focus. For fun, try this over an Am chord too.



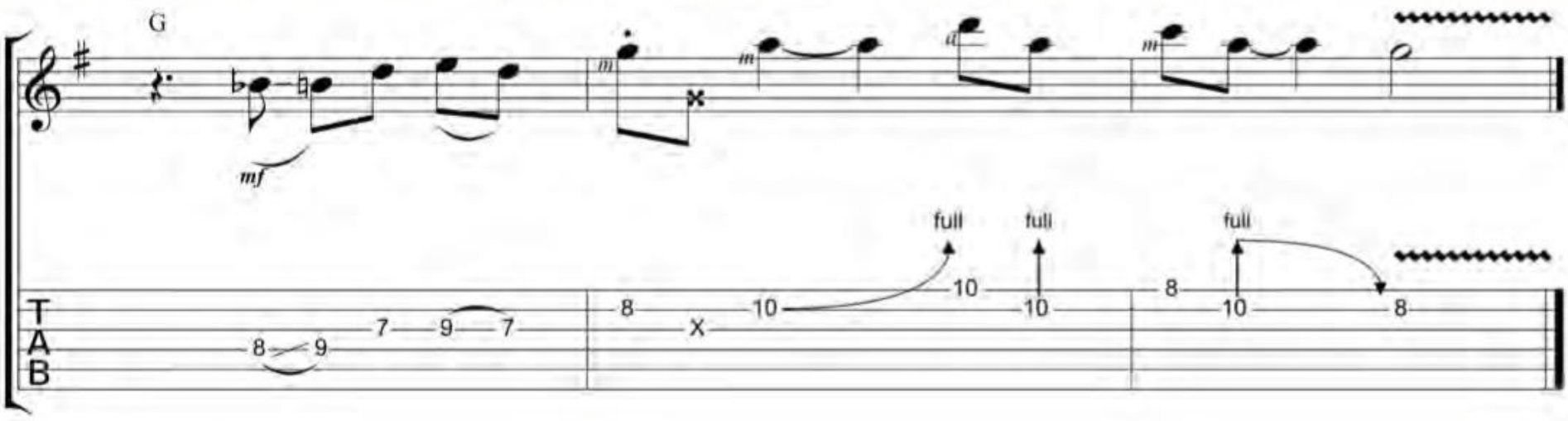
EXAMPLE 8 KEY OF A

Let's imitate the way pedal-steel players transition between chords with their pedals and knee levers. This lick begins with a short ascending phrase from the A major pentatonic scale. After that, bend the second to the third. After hitting the open E string too, you should be close to that magic pedal-steel sound. When you release the bend from C♯ down to B, you'll get a seamless transition from the A to the E chord that's much smoother than it would've been had you used a slide or a pull-off to make the move. Understanding how these notes outline part of the A and E major triads is key to being able to use this concept, so analyse this.



EXAMPLE 9 KEY OF G

We've used bends to outline a triad and to transition between chords, which are two tasty applications worth remembering. Another common technique, however, is to use pedal-steel bends to create tight intervals and generate brief moments of tension. Here, after the initial major pentatonic phrase, bend from the second to the third. You'll notice that familiar sweet sound when you move from the 10th to the 8th fret of the high E string and hear a minor second rub between the B and C. As you'll have to fret the C with your index finger, you won't have as much support to bend the B string, so put some extra effort into the intonation here.



PART 2 DIGGING DEEPER

With the basics covered, it's time to further explore how we can make use of open strings. Some of the applications here are open-position licks inspired by both traditional bluegrass and contemporary country rock. With these cascading licks, you'll master the dark arts of having several notes ringing out simultaneously, using pull-offs to open strings to simplify position shifts, and more. If you aren't already a frequent user of hybrid picking, this is the perfect time to get started. As a rule, it's good to use your middle finger any time you change from a lower to a higher string, as this eliminates the movement that can see your pick getting stuck between strings.

EXAMPLE 1 KEY OF G

Country music's close relationship with bluegrass is clear, and many of the most common bluegrass runs are played in the open position. Here's an example in the key of G, blending the Mixolydian mode and the blues scale. Many bluegrass players would flat-pick most of the notes here but I find that country players use legato more frequently. Try both approaches and see what feels comfortable to you.

EXAMPLE 2 KEY OF A

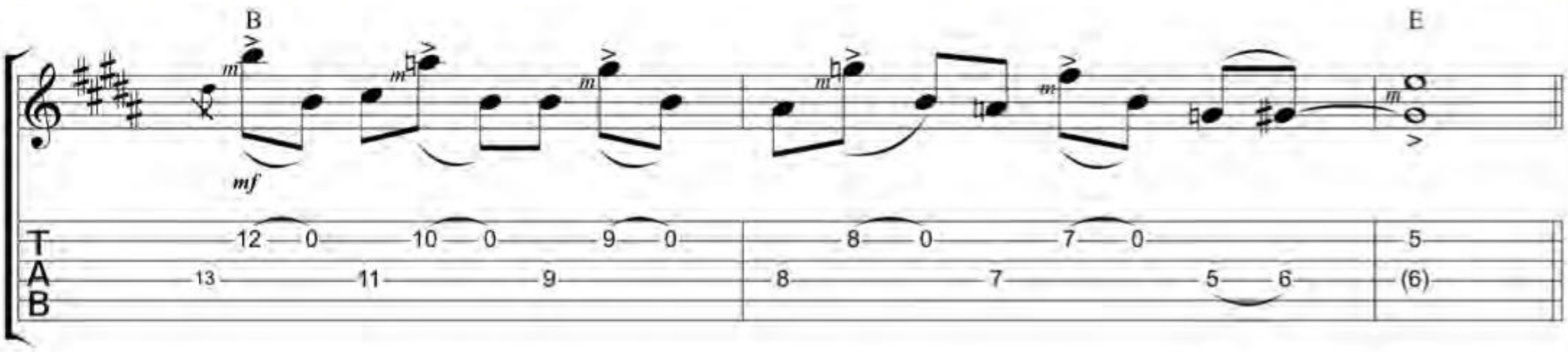
This lick makes me think of Brad Paisley and what he might play over a mid-tempo country-rock groove. Based around the blues scale with the addition of the major third, this one has a real edgy vibe. Inject some rhythmic interest by adding an accent whenever you go to the G string, since those notes fall on the fourth sixteenth note of beats 1 and 2.

EXAMPLE 3 KEYS OF G, A, E

These three examples feature descending runs based around the Mixolydian scale, with some blues-scale notes thrown in too. The common denominator is that we're using the open E and B strings but, since these are not played in the open position, the fingering can be confusing. Take your time and don't stress. In the recorded examples, I play these over a mid-tempo country-rock groove. But they work just as well over a train beat.

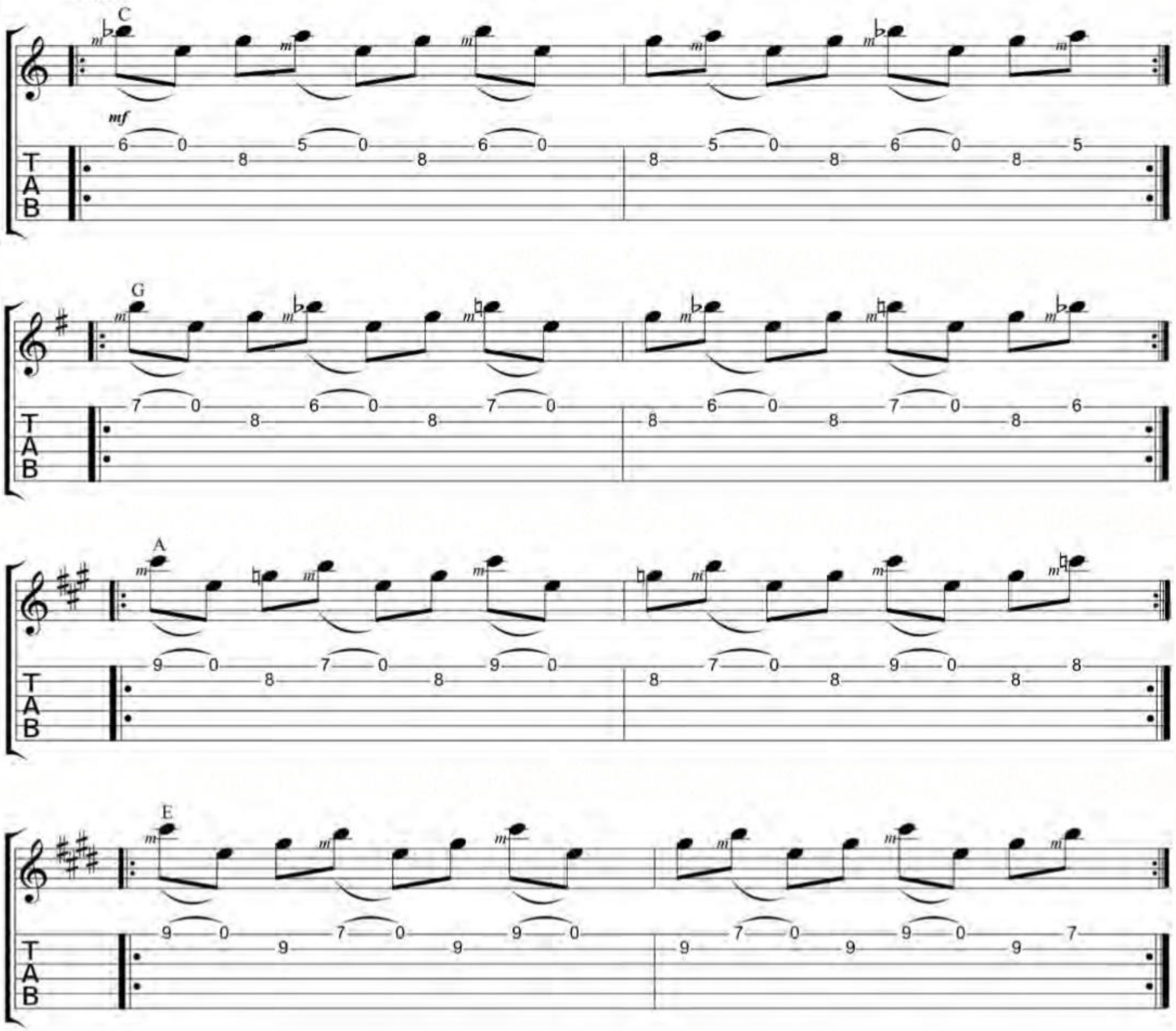
EXAMPLE 4 KEY OF B

All the previous examples unfold over a static chord but here we're transitioning from the I chord to the IV chord in the key of B. The descending sixths with pull-offs to the open B string give the phrase a sense of rhythmic displacement, with accents on every third eighth note. This is played in a key where the open string is the root note. But that's not necessary, as these notes are often used to create a particular rhythmic feel or to simplify position shifts. Try this in the key of A (where the open string will be the second/ninth of the chord) or key of G (where the open string will be the major third of the chord) and see how it sounds. Experiment by moving this to other string sets as well.



EXAMPLE 5 KEYS OF C, G, A, E

Full disclosure: I borrowed this idea from a Vince Gill solo! This slick repetitive lick should be played with a simple picking pattern. In the top example, the major third and fifth are the constant notes, and shifting between the major sixth and flat seventh gives things a C13 flavour. In the second example, the constant notes are the same but, because we're in the key of G, now act as the root and major sixth. Shift between the major and minor third to give it a bluesy feel. Using this technique, I came up with variations in A and E. Figure out what intervals are used here and you'll probably be able to come up with similar licks of your own.



EXAMPLE 6 KEY OF D

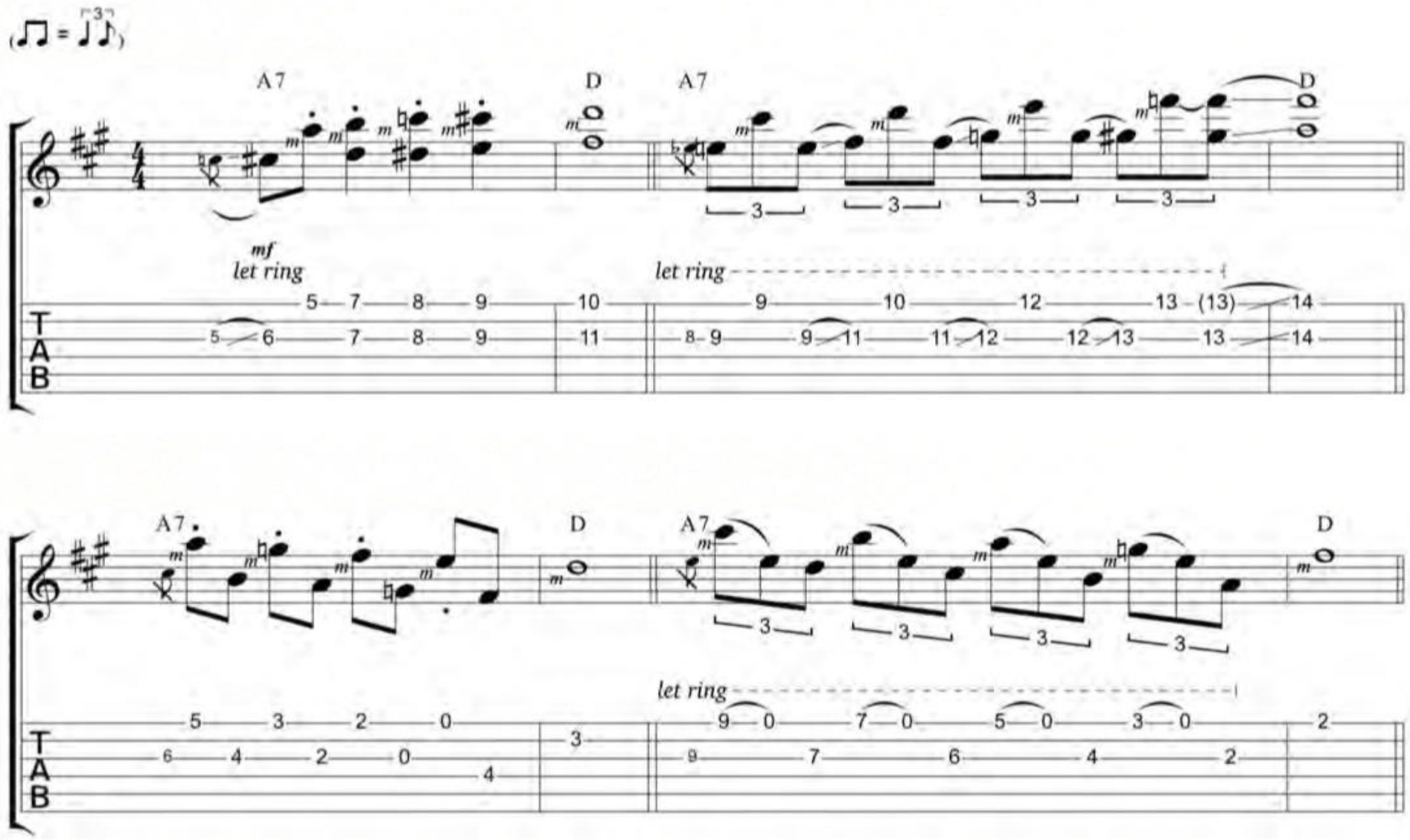
You can fret this entire example with just one finger, and it features several half-step slides and works well as a repetitive lick. In the second bar, the open D string and the D note on the 5th fret of the A string are played right after each other on two occasions. Why not just stick with one of them? Firstly, it sounds fantastic when they ring out together, because the string gauges are different – there's more fatness to the A and more spank and clarity to the D. Secondly, open strings and fretted notes always have a slightly different tonal quality, due to the material of the nut combined with the frets. This is a technique commonly used among banjo players – and we definitely want to borrow some inspiration from them, right?

PART 3 DOUBLE TROUBLE

To kick off the third phase of our exploration of country-guitar playing, we're doubling down on the doublestop. This section features examples on how to use doublestops over static chords and how to outline chord changes. Since doublestops sit right in between single notes and three-note chords (triads), they can lend a lot of harmonic intent and direction to your phrases. After all, you're *almost* playing a chord here. I'm playing these examples over train beats and country shuffles, as well as some more rockin' rhythms.

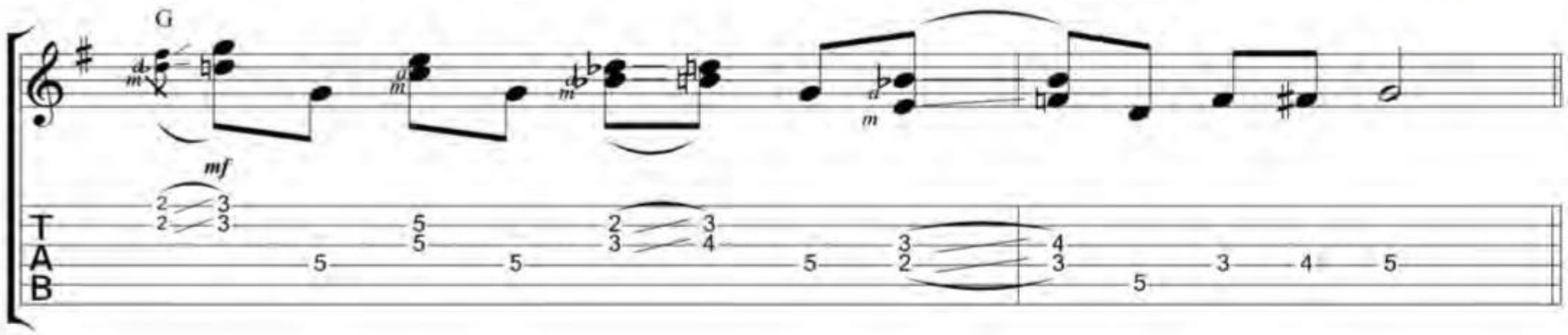
EXAMPLE 1 KEY OF A

Here are four variations of the same idea: playing parallel sixths to outline an A7 into a D. The first two examples are ascending and the last two descending. The ascending versions have one additional chromatic step to make sure you target the D with chord tones on a strong beat, while the descending versions are strictly within the Mixolydian mode. Prepare for hybrid picking and use your middle finger on the highest note of each doublestop. There are different variations in the phrasing. Check out the tabs and listen to the recorded examples. Feel free to mix and match in any way you like.



EXAMPLE 2 KEY OF G

This example is similar to the fourth lick in part 1 but extends the same idea further by adding a wicked tritone doublestop (sliding into the flat seventh and major third from a half step below), which outlines more clearly that we are playing over a dominant seventh chord. To minimise confusion with the fingering, keep your middle finger on the G string and move your index finger up and down the string sets for the different doublestops.



EXAMPLE 3 KEY OF B

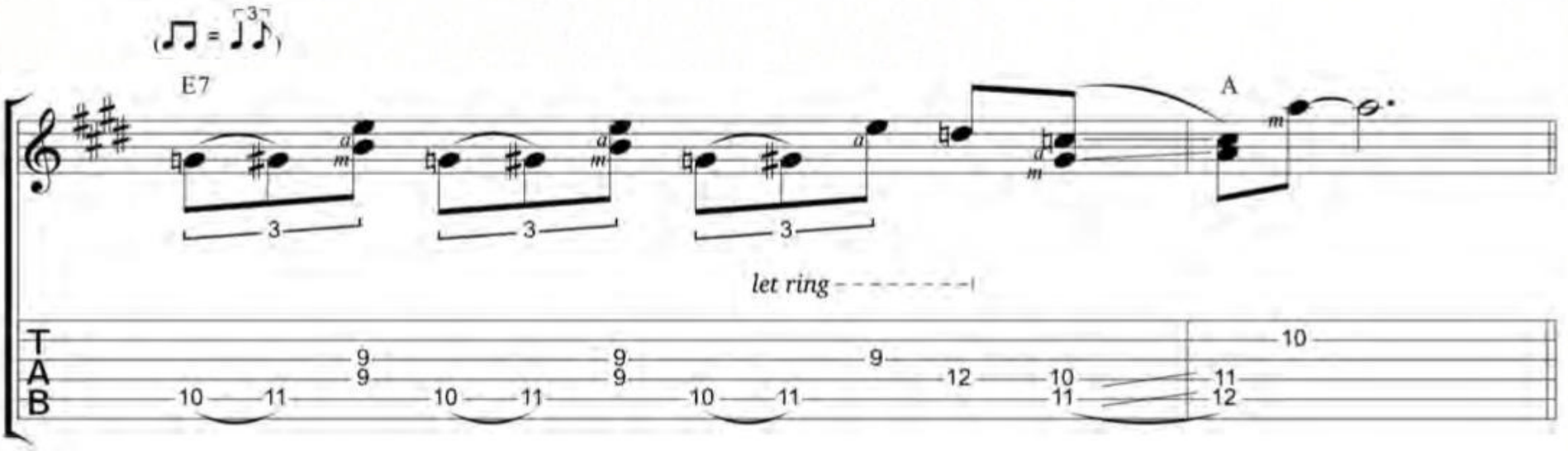
These four variations are again based around the same idea: a doublestop on the G and B strings, and two notes on the D string executed with a hammer-on, pull-off or slide. This means you have a rhythm of three notes that repeat themselves and, when played as 16th notes, create a compelling sense of rhythmic displacement. You can exaggerate this effect by accenting the doublestops. These variations clearly outline a B7 tonality – mostly it's just chord tones but the third and fourth examples also add some chromatic leading notes and upper extensions.

EXAMPLE 4 KEY OF D

Let's get even more rooting-tooting country by chucking in some characteristic ghost notes, an integral feature of chicken pickin'. Here, the first three doublestops use the root note as a high drone as you play a descending chromatic line derived from the blues scale. But here's the secret: play these staccato and add a muted G string in between those doublestops et voila: ghost notes. But we're not done yet. Play the muted D string twice before the second part of this phrase – the first with your pick, the second with your index finger and the bent note on the G string with your middle finger. If you've come this far, the rest should be easy.

EXAMPLE 5 KEY OF E OR A

This example outlines an E7 going into an A, and can be used as the I-IV chord in the key of E and as the V-I chord in the key of A. Since it doesn't use open strings, it can easily be moved to any other key too. Experiment with playing the minor-to-major-third movement in three ways: as a slide with your ring finger; as a hammer-on; and by hitting both notes with your flat pick, to give it a different articulation. Listen to the subtle differences in the recorded examples.



EXAMPLE 6 KEY OF C

This one's an excellent way to end an old-school country shuffle. Here, a single-note pick-up is followed by some parallel thirds. After that, you'll outline the V-I ending with some contrary motion, as the major third of the V chord goes *up* half a step to the root of the I chord, while the flat seventh of the V chord goes *down* half a step, targeting the major third of the I chord. This is one of the strongest harmonic movements in country music.

EXAMPLE 7 KEY OF A

This starts with a doublestop sliding chromatically into the root and major third and continues in a way that reminds me of Brent Mason's chromatics. After the initial doublestop, play the six descending chromatic steps from the flat seventh degree (G) to the perfect fourth (D). The reason this works and doesn't sound discordant is because you're targeting chord tones on the strong beats of the bar. This example ends with the root and major third but, played as a sixth instead of a third (as in the beginning of the lick), it creates a reversed interval. See the bonus tip below.

EXAMPLE 8 KEY OF G

This fun phrase is inspired by Albert Lee, though many other players use this kind of lick too. Here, you're playing over a full VI-II-V-I progression, outlining dominant seventh chords. The common denominator of the first three chords are the pull-offs to the open G and B strings. Use your middle and ring fingers to give the doublestops a solid twang by grabbing the G and B strings and snapping them back against the fretboard.

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BONUS TIP
FLIP REVERSE IT

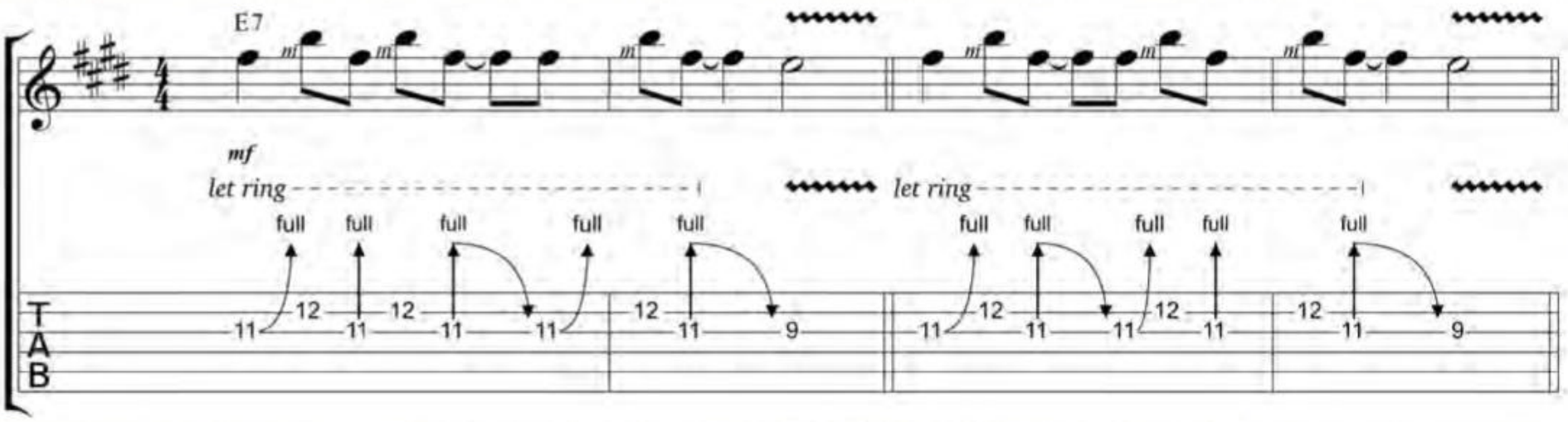
Reversed intervals can help you maximise the flexibility of your playing. Licks played as sixths usually sound fantastic as thirds too. Just change the octave of either note so that they end up closer to each other in pitch – either move the lower note one octave higher or move the higher note one octave lower. Mastering reversed intervals can greatly extend the applications of these licks and phrases.

PART 4 TOUCH OF STEEL

For our fourth lesson, we're levelling up and adding some country-flavoured bends to the equation. Many of these ideas are inspired by the ways pedal-steel players use their foot pedals and knee levers. The following notions once more make use of doublestops too, but with the added texture, expression and melodic possibilities offered by string bending. Here, you'll learn how bends can help you highlight the tones of static chords, how to outline chord changes, and how to add a slippery feel to your playing using chromatic passing tones.

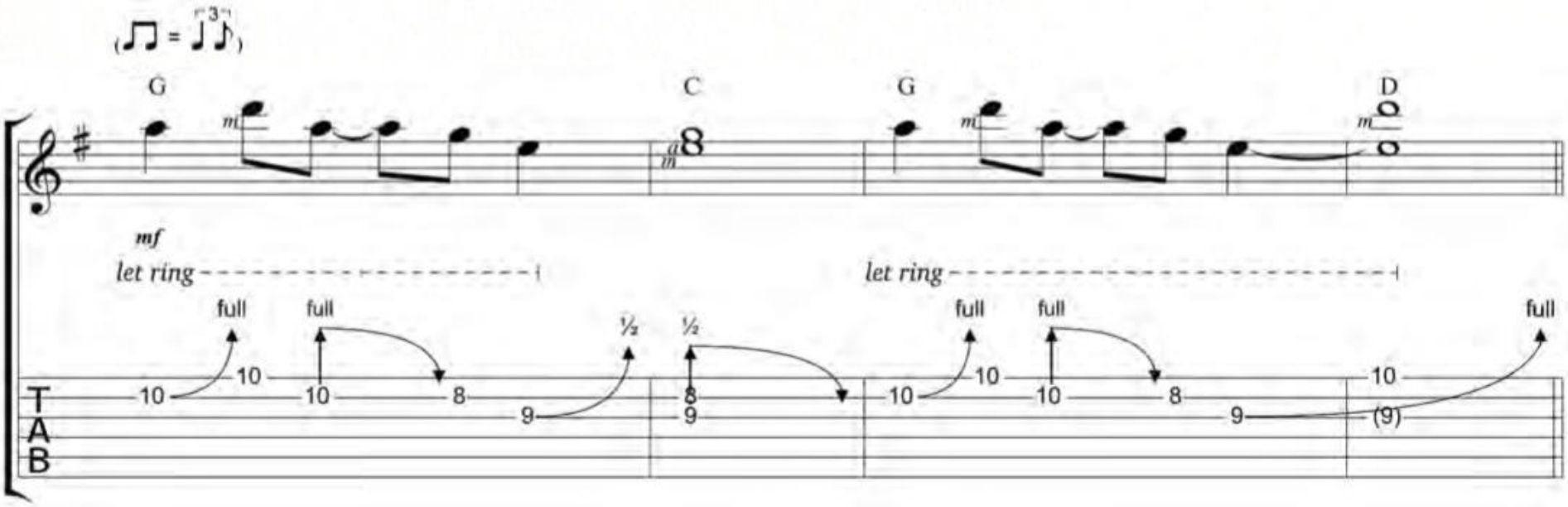
EXAMPLE 1 KEY OF E

The key to making this example sound great is to focus on the intonation of your bend. That might be a given but here I'm referring specifically to when you're hitting the unbent B string. It's common to hear players bend the G string perfectly up to pitch but then accidentally drop it a little flat when hitting the B string. Since you're trying to imitate the pedal-steel sound here, try to make the strings ring along with each other. Focus on the bend even where you're hitting another note. Check out the two halves of this example, where the melodic framework remains the same but the rhythm changes from one to the next. Experiment with longer lines and try to find your own variations. Listen to the audio examples for inspiration.



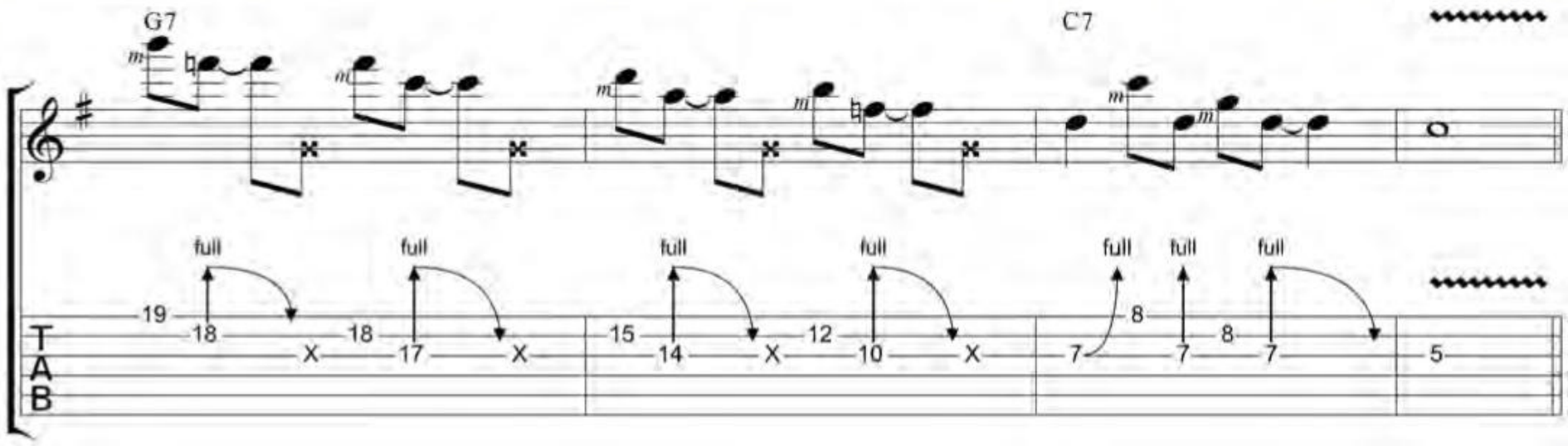
EXAMPLE 2 KEY OF G

This example demonstrates how to outline the transition from the I to the IV chord, as well as from the I to the V chord, all using simple bending ideas. Begin by bending into the major third from a whole step below and then adding the fifth on top. When transitioning to the IV chord, bend up to the flat seventh from half a step below and add the root note, which creates a certain dissonance due to the major second interval between the F and G. Now, as you release the bent note down to E, you're outlining the major third and fifth of the IV chord. Go through the same thought process and explain the transition from G7 to D7 to yourself.



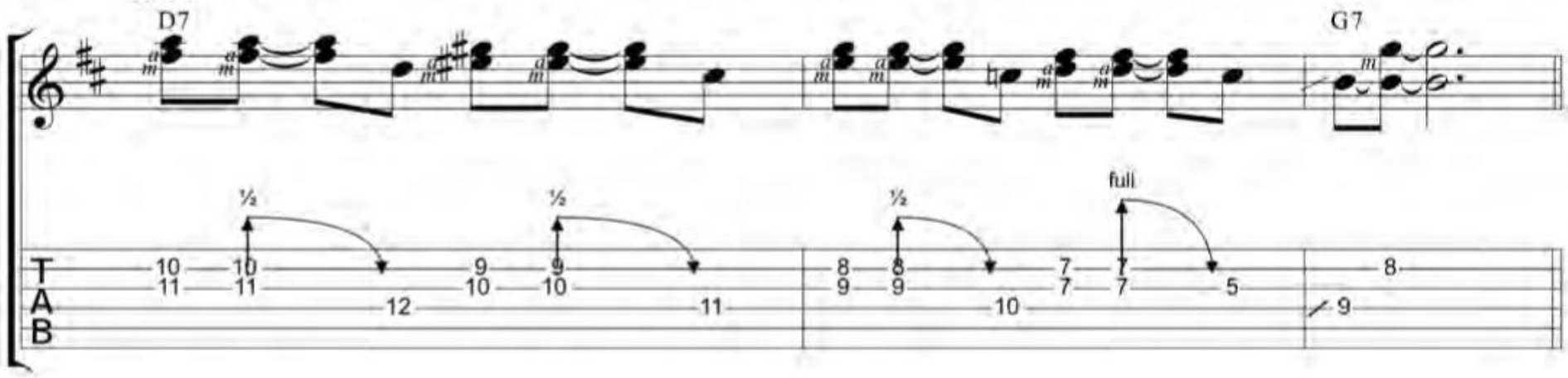
EXAMPLE 3 KEY OF G

This phrase moves between different positions. This idea is based on a repetitive rhythm that is countrified even more thanks to the added ghost notes. The first two bars outlines a dominant seventh chord. But instead of giving you the targeted intervals, I'm going to tell you which CAGED shapes I see these bends around. The first is based around the D shape, the second around the E shape and, in the second bar, the two bends are based around the G shape and A shape, respectively. As you can see, that's CAGED backwards. That's because you're moving down the neck towards the nut. If this makes sense to you, you've come a long way in understanding the layout of the fretboard. Otherwise, I'd encourage you to look deeper into the CAGED system.



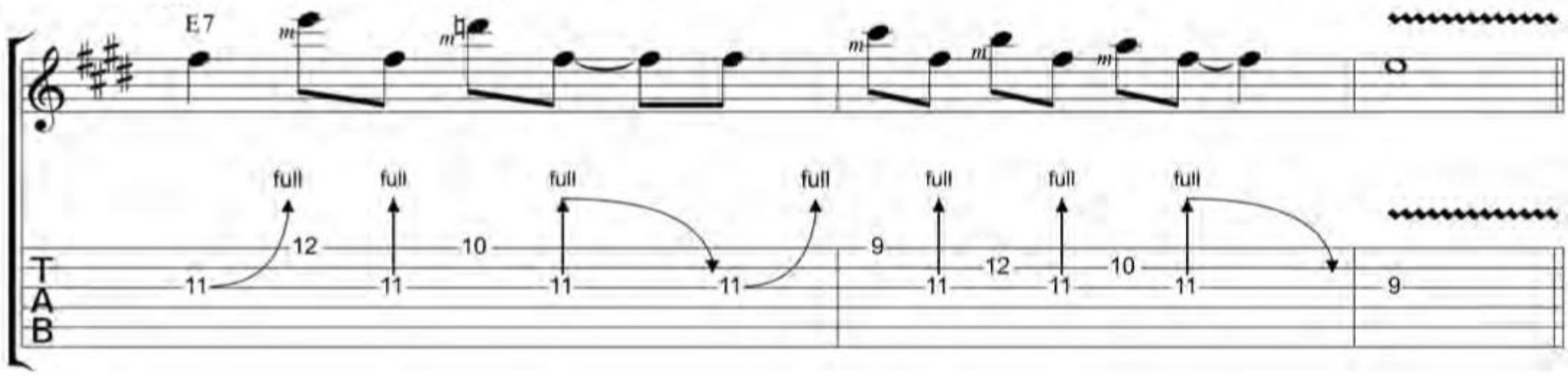
EXAMPLE 4 KEY OF D

The slipperiness of this phrase comes mostly because it doesn't just outline chord tones like the previous examples but also includes some chromatic passing notes with bends. Begin by playing this without bends and you'll notice that you're outlining a D major triad, a C♯ major triad, a C major triad and a D7 (without the fifth) before ending on the major third and root of the G chord. The D is obvious, right? The C is built on the seventh degree from the Mixolydian mode – the most commonly used for dominant seventh chords. The D7 may lead you naturally into the G but how does that C♯ major triad fit in? Placed chromatically between two triads that are within the same key, it adds an interesting twist but also resolves so quickly your ears won't pick up any weird sound. All that's left is to add in those bends and nail this neat lick.



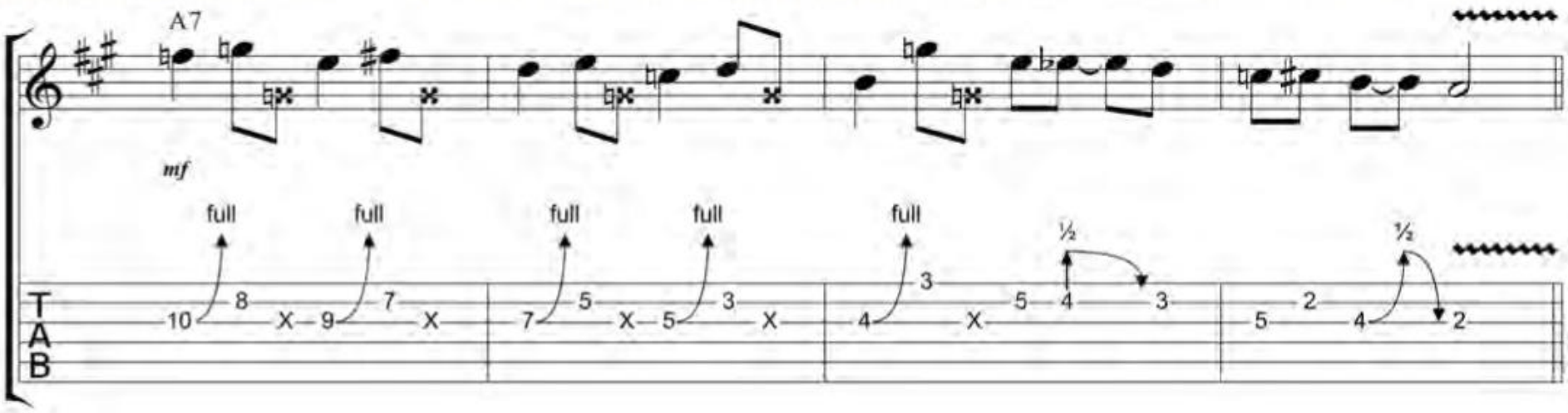
EXAMPLE 5 KEY OF E

Remember what I said about focusing on the intonation of the bent notes on the G string while hitting notes on higher strings in example 1 of part 4? If you practised that properly, it'll certainly help you here. Using this bent note as a pivotal point, play a descending E Mixolydian scale on the high E and B strings. With some practise, you'll hear how the overtones melt into each other in a rich and beautiful way.



EXAMPLE 6 KEY OF A

This phrase doesn't boast the same pedal-steel influences as the previous ideas. However, these bends coupled with ghost notes will hopefully take you into chicken-pickin' heaven. Start with a descending Mixolydian line, beginning from the flat seventh and bending a whole step on the G string to target the same notes on the B string. The ghost notes on the G string add the spice here, so be sure to focus on getting them right. Play a downstroke on the G string, pull the B string with your middle finger to give it a snap, then play the ghost note with an upstroke on the muted G string. The final part of the lick involves blending between the Mixolydian mode and the blues scale with some half-step bends that give it a jazzy feel thanks to all the chromatics.



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PART 5 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Congratulations if you've made it this far. Your reward is one final challenge: to combine everything you've learnt about country guitar and tackle a pair of 30-second solos designed to show off everything you can do. The first is a traditional-style solo over a country shuffle, and shouldn't strain your resolve too much, especially if you've worked your way through these lessons with care and attention. The second solo, however, should test your mettle – it's a country-rock ripper over a train beat, played using a dirtier tone. Master this final lesson and it might be time for you to pack your bags and head to Music City yourself. Good luck – Nashville beckons!

© Sean Marshall

TRADITIONAL COUNTRY SOLO OVER A SHUFFLE KEY OF E

BAR 1-2 E7

Start this solo by outlining an E major triad pedal steel-style, bending into the third from a whole step below. Pay attention to the articulation, as the contrast between the longer notes and the staccato and muted ghost notes is what makes this lick come alive. In bar 2, there's an ascending group of diatonic thirds that leads into the next chord. As we've covered already, throughout these lessons, you're free to invert intervals, so why not try and play this as diatonic sixths instead? To do so, change the octave of one of the notes in each doublestop, for example lowering the G♯, A and B so they're below E, F♯ and G♯.

BAR 3-4 A7-E7

After targeting the root and third of A7 in the ascending lick that begins in bar 2, continue with a couple of ghost notes and a pedal-steel move that outlines the transition back to the I chord. By releasing the bend from C♯ down to the B and keeping that high E, you're highlighting the third and fifth of A7 and the fifth and root of E7. It's traditional, laidback and well suited to country shuffles like this.

BAR 5-6 E7

This section maintains the pedal-steel vibe and uses the major pentatonic scale exclusively – well, almost. The final note is a chromatic passing note that leads up to the V chord in the next bar. The focus here should be to get a nice, swung timing in the bends.

BAR 7-8 B7

Here, it's all about the use of sixths on the D and B strings. Slide into the first two sets of sixths and let the notes ring out together. Add some intensity in bar 8 by pulling off to the open B string in a series of eighth-note triplets that target the flat seventh and fifth of the B7 chord.

BAR 9-10 E7

Let's spice things up. This phrase uses three open strings and combines an E7 arpeggio and the E blues scale. It can be confusing adding open strings when you're playing higher on the fretboard – our ears, eyes and fingers tend to disagree with one another and it can be tough to nail the fingering. A word of advice, then: try to recognise that each open string is preceded by a note one string lower. Before you hit the open E, you play a note on the B string, and so on. Using hybrid picking and plucking the open strings with your middle finger here can be a big benefit here too. Check the details in the tabs. In bar 10, there's a major pentatonic triplet line followed by some doublestops that lead towards the IV chord, approaching the third and fifth of A7 from a half step below.

BAR 11-12 A7-F♯7

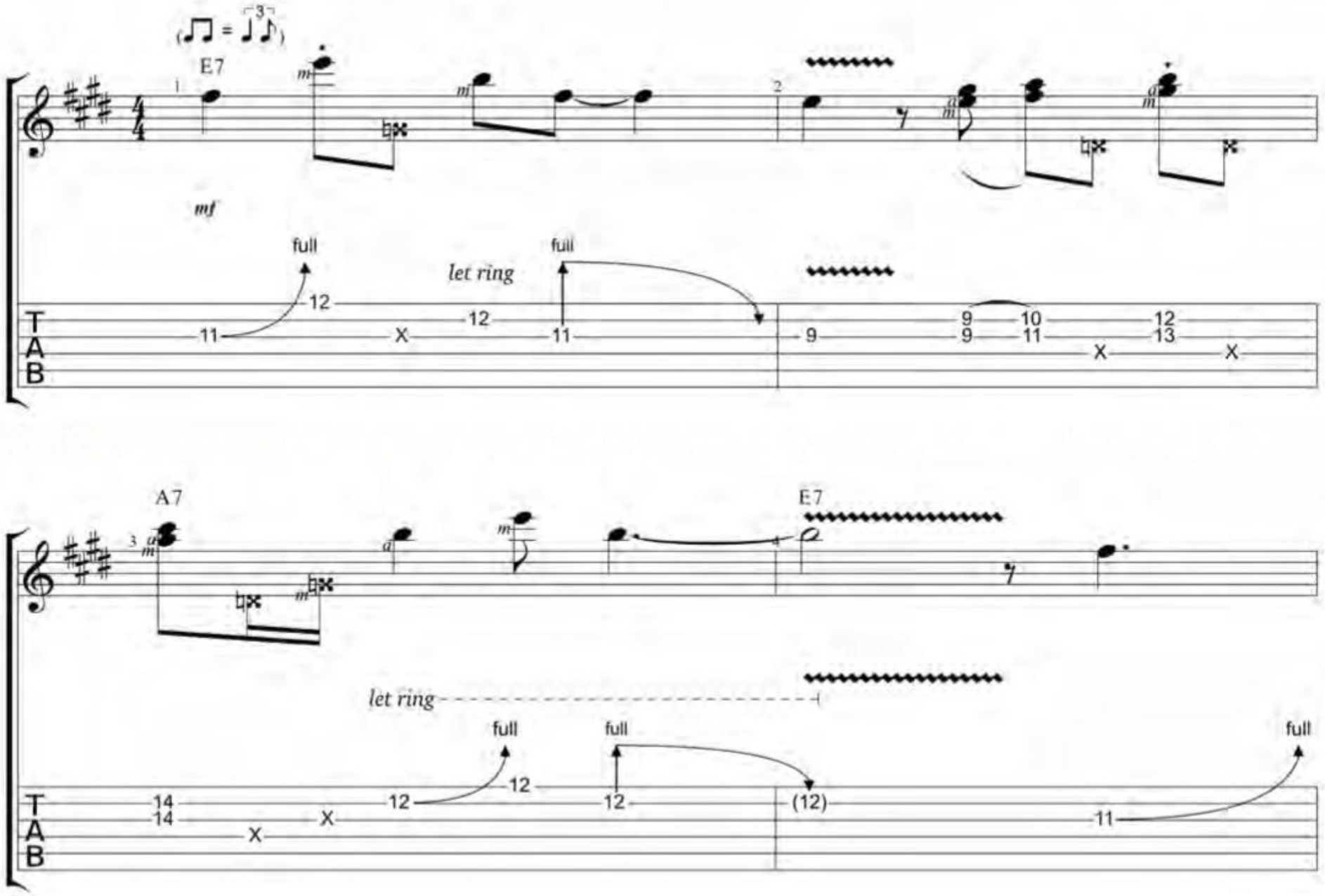
After a few intense bars, let's slow things down. You're mostly outlining the A major triad but adding a half-step bend to briefly imply a sus4, something pedal-steel players do to add movement within chords. They can execute this with a pedal but us guitar players have to use a middle finger. Going outside the key to the F♯7, slide into the major third and add the root on the B string, creating a minor sixth interval. Remember how an inverted major third interval becomes a minor sixth?

BAR 13-14 E7-B7

Sliding into the fifth and third of E7 from a half step below and adding the root on the open high E string establishes that you're back into the safe zone of E major here. To outline the transition between the I chord and V chord, use another idea stolen from pedal-steel players. Usually, you'd bend the lower note in these doublestops but, here, keep the B note on the D string while bending and releasing the 11th fret of the G string. Over the B7 chord, play a short phrase that mostly emphasises the major sixth of the chord. This gives things a harmonically sweet sound. Add some edge by using ghost notes to raise the chicken factor.

BAR 15-16 E7

Cap off this solo with a descending melody (E-C♯-B-A-G♯), keeping the E on top to give it a fuller sound. You can see the connection here to what many would call Hendrix-style rhythm playing. But these kinds of ideas – essentially embellishing a major triad with notes from the major scale – work across many styles.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COUNTRY ROCK SOLO OVER A TRAIN BEAT KEY OF G

BAR 1-2 G7

In the first phrase, use several pull-offs to open strings while outlining a G7 chord. A few half-step slides that approach the major third and fifth from half a step below give this line a nice, fluid sound with a bluesy edge.

BAR 3-4 G7

Move up to the fifth position and continue using pull-offs to open strings. There are two things that add harmonic tension to this phrase: a C major arpeggio used over the G7 chord in the middle of bar 3 and the chromatically sliding minor thirds in bar 4. These doublestops start on the fifth and flat seventh and hit the sharp fifth and major seventh briefly before resolving to the major third and fifth of the IV chord.

BAR 5-6 C7

After sliding into the major third and fifth and applying some vibrato, approach the same notes by bending into the third from a whole step below. Right before resolving back to the I chord, change the fifth to the fourth (of C7), creating a half-step rub between the E and F notes, and then release the bent G string...

BAR 7-8 G7

... down to the D note, with the fifth and flat seventh ringing out together. Using these kinds of dissonant bends and resolving them to more harmonically stable intervals of the target chord you're adding a doublestop at the start of bar 11 and, in the next bar, playing two banjo-roll-inspired patterns (be sure to use hybrid picking here) before hitting the bend that leads into the next 12 bar chorus.

BAR 13-16 G7

Kick off this chorus with some pedal-steel bends. You're outlining the G7 chord here, and there's a compelling contrast between the smooth, legato feel in bars 13 and 15, and the more percussive chicken-pickin' vibe that comes through via the staccato in bars 14 and 16. Work extra hard to ensure that these differences feel natural under your fingers.

BAR 17-18 C7

Following the chicken-picked doublestop bending extravaganza of the past few bars, change the mood here and play a line of single notes embellished by chromaticism. Over these two bars, you're playing every note except D♭ and A♭ – in other words, you're covering every interval except the minor second and minor sixth. Why doesn't it just sound like a random chromatic line, then? The trick is to play chord tones on the strongest beats (the first and third of each bar). This line is constructed in such a way that allows for that – except for bar 14 starting on the minor third. But this is followed by the major third, so it gives things a slight delayed-resolution effect.

BAR 19-20 G7-E7

Take a second to breathe, as the next two bars are probably the most simple part of this solo: no bends, no chromatics, just outlining the chords with some sliding sixths on the D and B strings. As the technique is easy, add some harmonic interest instead. Break out of the I-IV-V progression by adding the E7 chord, built on the sixth degree of the G major scale.

BAR 21-22 A7-D7

Continuing with sixths on the D and B strings, add some pull-offs to the open B string in bar 21. This phrase has a nice sense of rhythmic displacement, since you're repeating a descending pattern of three eighth notes. Transition into the V chord by sliding into the root and major third from a half step below. Follow this with a descending chromatic line that goes from the flat seventh to the fifth.

BAR 23-24 G7

End with a classic bluegrass-inspired line. This phrase is mostly major pentatonic, with a pedal-steel bend outlining a G major triad.

These solos should have taught you a thing or two, but don't feel it's necessary to play them from beginning to end. You're free to separate these phrases and use them in other contexts. Hopefully, the explanations have given you an idea of how they're constructed.

BAR 9-10 D7

In these two bars, we're implying three minor thirds. Why three minor triads over a dominant seventh chord? The first is A minor, and these notes (A-C-E) are essentially the fifth, flat seventh and major ninth of the D chord, which creates a D9 sound. After combining the blues scale and major pentatonic phrase, begin bar 8 by implying a B minor triad, creating a D6 sound. Both the D9 and D6 fit within our dominant seventh/Mixolydian tonality, right? But how does a B♭ minor triad fit over a D7 chord? It's the flat sixth, major seventh and minor third of the D7, so there are clearly no typical Mixolydian intervals in there. If you don't resolve this, it will sound awful. However, as long as you descend another half step and emphasise the flat seventh and ninth on the strong third beat of the bar, you'll get away with it, and even add a bit of flavour. Don't be afraid to use chromaticism, not only with single notes but also with doublestops and triads.

BAR 11-12 G7

This phrase is similar to that at the beginning of this solo. What's changed, however, is that here

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D7

G7
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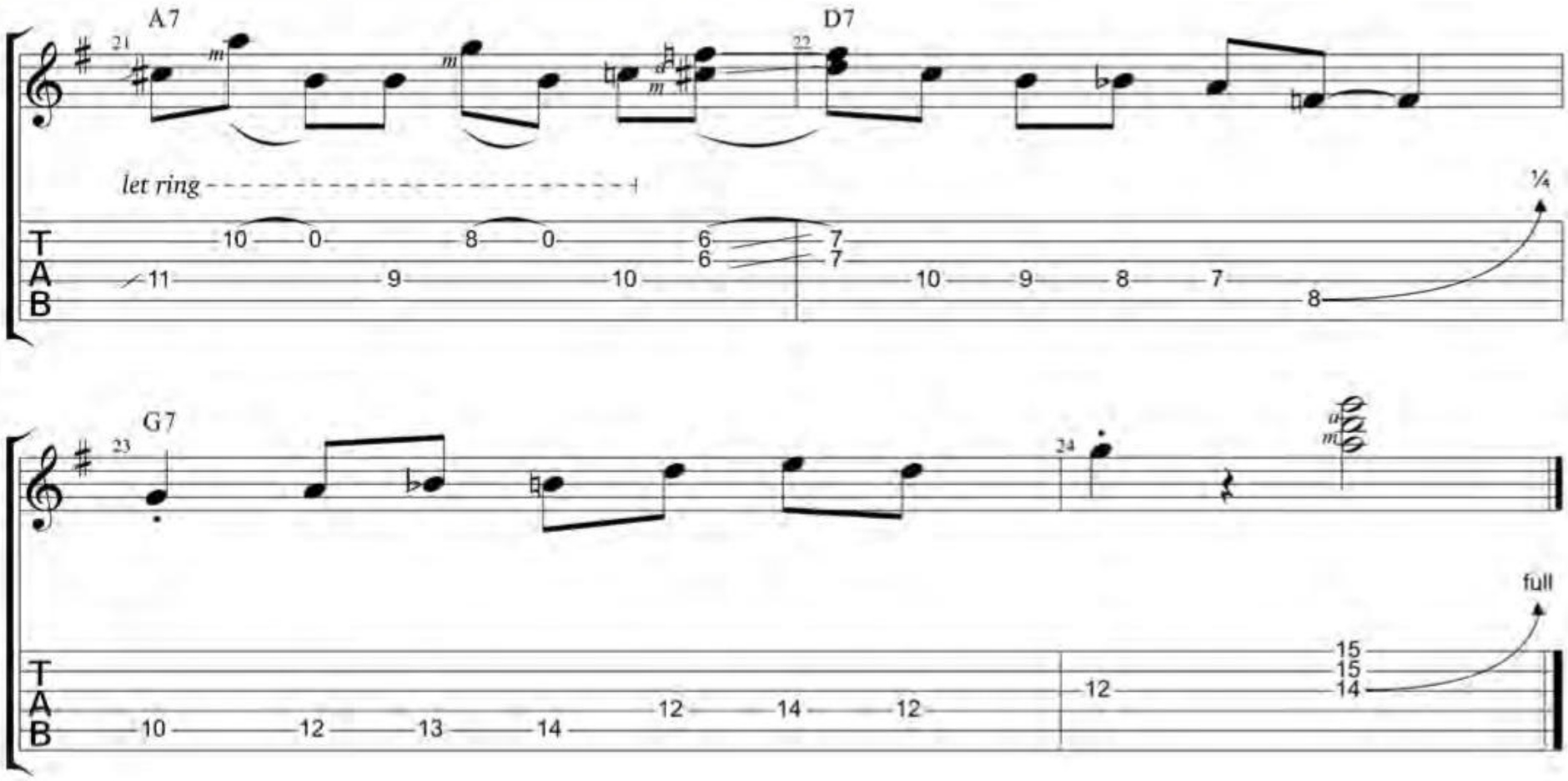

THE ULTIMATE COUNTRY GUITAR LESSON

FINAL THOUGHTS

I hope this has been fun and insightful for you, and that you'll take something from the ideas behind these licks, as opposed to just the licks themselves – the written explanations are just as important, as they'll help you understand how these techniques work and why I chose them. In a way, country guitar is similar to jazz, in that it often outlines the underlying chord progression. Another thing to keep in mind is that all these skills can be applied to other styles of playing – open-string licks, doublestops and pedal-steel bends can be used throughout many other genres, just tweak the tonality, rhythm and phrasing. Using techniques borrowed from country guitar in other styles can even help you develop a more distinctive sound.

If you enjoyed this lesson, check out David Henriksson's TrueFire guitar course *Elektrik Blues*, and keep an eye out for his debut solo EP – recorded in Nashville and produced by session maestro Guthrie Trapp – this October.

To keep up with David's latest news and releases, follow him on social media: linktr.ee/davidhenrikssonmusik

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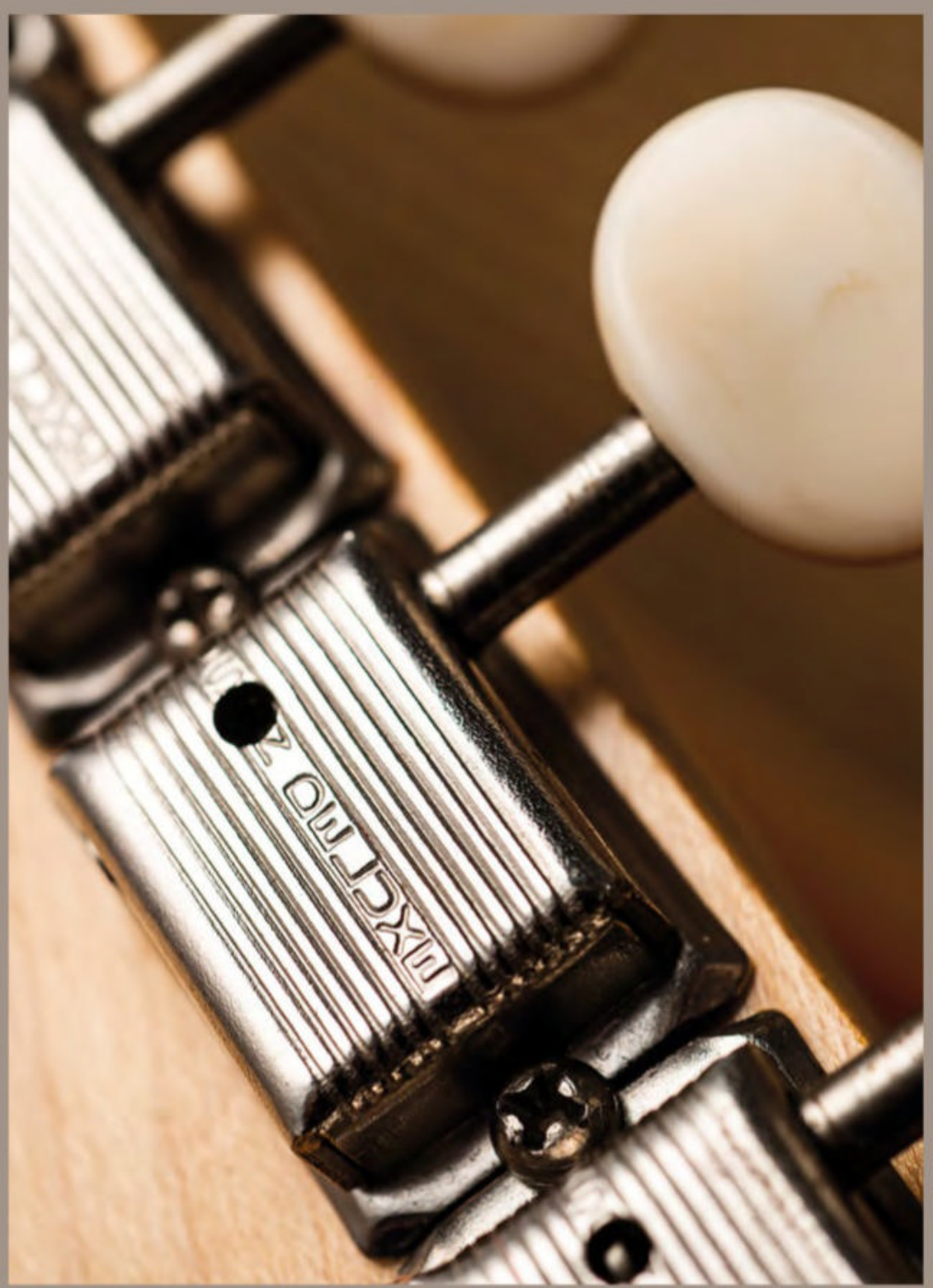

THE MONEY SHOT

1957 FENDER MUSICMASTER

A wonderful vintage student model in time-capsule condition

This instrument was already sold when we saw it on the wall at ATB Guitars but it was simply too cool not to grab for a photoshoot before it was collected by its new owner. Personalised with the type of self-adhesive letters often used on American luggage and mailboxes back in the day, 'Ron' is about as fine an example of an original Fender Musicmaster as you are likely to encounter.

The Musicmaster (single pickup) and Duo-Sonic (twin pickup) were introduced as 22.5-inch scale student models midway through 1956. However, as this '57 Musicmaster proves, even instruments intended for beginners were manufactured in Fullerton to the same quality standards and with the same materials that make Stratocasters and Telecasters of the late 1950s so desirable.

Complete with its rare original case and a strap and cable of the era, the Musicmaster's original Desert Sand finish is in fine condition, while the very small amount of wear on its gorgeous V-shaped neck is concentrated in the first position. Whoever Ron was, he not only took very good care of his guitar, but he seems to have been a 'strictly rhythm' kind of guy.

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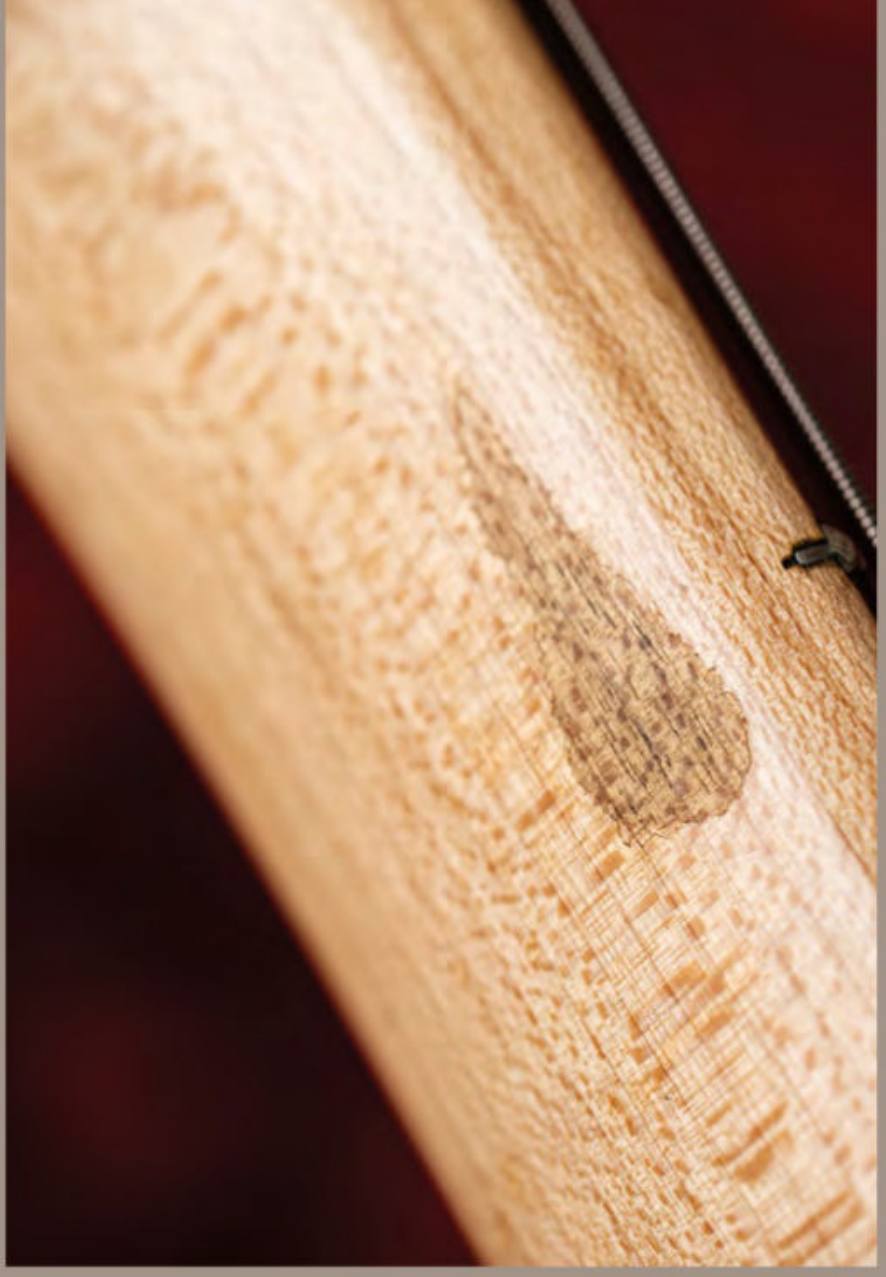

Fender
MUSICMASTER

Fender

VINTAGE BENCH TEST

1965 FENDER ELECTRIC XII

This electrifying instrument was only made from 1965 to 1970 but its contribution to the sonic legacy of guitar music is significant

WORDS HUW PRICE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Unless you've recently beamed in from another dimension, you've almost certainly heard a Fender Electric XII doing its thing. From Pete Townshend's playing on *Tommy* to Jimmy Page's on *Stairway To Heaven* and *Beck's Bolero*, as well as classic recordings by The Velvet Underground, Tim Buckley and Tom Petty, the list goes on and on.

ABOVE Equipped with a pair of split single-coils, the Electric XII could be considered a four-pickup guitar

ABOVE RIGHT These F-stamp tuners have been retrofitted and there's evidence of the original Klusons on the back of the headstock

RIGHT The original hue of the Blue Ice Metallic finish is visible beneath the headstock decal

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £8,995 (inc original case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody 12-string electric guitar, made in the US
BUILD Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with rosewood veneer fingerboard, 21 frets, pearloid dot markers
HARDWARE Fender Electric XII bridge, F-stamp tuners (non-original)
ELECTRONICS 2x split single-coil pickups, master volume and tone, 4-way switch
SCALE LENGTH 648mm/25.5"
NECK WIDTH 41.3mm at nut, 54.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.6mm at first fret, 22.7mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.3mm at nut, 57.4mm at bridge
WEIGHT 4.07kg/8.97lb
FINISH Blue Ice Metallic
CONTACT atbguitars.com

This Electric XII comes in a rare custom colour and delivers sounds to die for but, before we get into that, let's take a closer look at it. The model was introduced in the summer of 1965 and, by the following year, Electric XII necks had acquired white binding. The pearloid dot markers and unbound rosewood veneer 'board indicate that this is a fairly early example, and a November '65 neck stamp provides confirmation.

Blocks replaced dots in the summer of 1966 but the vast majority of Electric XIIs we've seen appear to have unbound necks with dot markers. By 1968, Fender moved to a black decal and F-stamp tuners. This example has had later tuners retrofitted – screw holes for the original Klusons can be seen on the back of the headstock beside the outer units.

Other than that, the only things that appear to have been changed since this guitar left the factory are the strings. It's a lot less fiddly to string up an Electric XII than that other mighty electrified 12-string, the Rickenbacker 360/12. At the headstock end though, you do need to thread the six inside strings through small holes in the string retainer.

Leo's idea of a fully intonatable 12-string bridge has never been bettered. It's compact, easy to adjust and fixes the string spacing. Each cylindrical saddle differs in diameter to achieve the desired string arc and the action is set via a screw at each end of the bridge plate.

As is occasionally the case with vintage custom-colour Fenders, the name of the finish is more applicable to the way the guitar looked back when it was originally released than the way it appears today. What was once Blue Ice Metallic has become a light, mossy metallic green. But we think it looks absolutely amazing all the same.

Fender offered Blue Ice (often called Ice Blue) Metallic between 1965 and 1969. Originally a light-blue acrylic lacquer used on Ford automobiles, Fender sprayed it over a white base coat with clear nitrocellulose top coats. Over time, the clear coats yellowed up and, as you'll hopefully remember from kindergarten art classes, mixing blue and yellow makes green.

You can get a sense of how the colour originally looked from the headstock, on which the decal has shielded the clear coats from UV light. The blue is even more vivid under the metal control plate too.

Here, we also find two one-meg potentiometers, a 0.022uF tone capacitor and even the signature of the person who wired it all up. Sadly, it's indecipherable.

You could describe this as a four-pickup guitar. In one of his final designs for the company that carries his name, Leo opted to use two coils for each pickup rather than one – much as he did on the Precision Bass and persisted with throughout his subsequent career with G&L.

Lacquer checking is fairly minimal on the body and matching headstock face, as is often the case with thin nitro over Lucite. Checking is more evident on the back of headstock, which looks amazing, but otherwise the finish is in excellent condition.

The guitar has clearly been played a lot, because much of the lacquer has worn through on the back of the neck. But we find that this enhances the playing feel – there's nothing quite like a well-played Fender neck from the early to mid-1960s.

IN USE

If you've never handled a Fender Electric XII or indeed a Coronado XII before, when you do, you will likely be struck by its easy playability. So often, 12-string guitars have a daunting action and the strings can be so tightly cramped together that they're fiendishly tricky to play.

In contrast, Fender widened its standard neck slightly for this model and the action is as low as you'd expect on well-sorted Strat or Tele. Granted, you're unlikely to attempt whole-tone bends on this guitar but it requires little additional effort to play, and the wider-than-usual original frets are in great shape.

The unplugged tone bodes well, with smooth dynamics, impressive sustain and a wide but balanced frequency response. The intonation is also remarkably accurate and it's one of those electric guitars that is almost as inspiring to play unplugged as it is through an amplifier.

ABOVE The original master volume and tone knobs remain present and correct

ABOVE LEFT Rather than individual ferrules, the Electric XII is strung through a chrome back plate

LEFT Hints of the Electric XII's Blue Ice Metallic hue are also just about visible beneath the yellowed clear coats in some areas of body wear

ABOVE The chunky four-way control switch still functions but the neck/bridge in series option is absent

ABOVE RIGHT The original Fender Electric XII bridge design has never been bettered

RIGHT The neck has a wonderful played-in feel

FAR RIGHT The rosewood veneer fingerboard sports 21 frets and pearloid dot markers

The volume and tone controls combine with the four-way switch to produce an impressive range of tones. No doubt Fender explored the various possibilities offered by four independent coils but the arrangement here doesn't quite tally with the published specifications.

The options supposedly include neck, neck/bridge in parallel and bridge only. By lightly tapping the tops of these coils with a screwdriver, we can determine which are active with any given setting. Placing the switch in the down position selects the two neck coils for a fat but chiming tone. The next position activates both bridge coils and this tone is instantly recognisable as the setting Jimmy Page used on *Stairway To Heaven*.

Following on, you get all four coils but they're combined in a way that sounds somewhat out of phase while not lacking in body. Imagine a dreamy electric harpsichord somewhere in Southern California. The final position takes you back to the two neck coils, and is sonically indistinguishable from the first position.

The neck/bridge in series option is therefore absent and, since there's no evidence that this guitar has been modded, we speculate that some earlier Electric XIIs such as this one may have left the factory before Fender finalised the wiring configuration.

Nevertheless, all the settings sound full, clear and detailed. Each has a distinct personality and they sound so wonderful plugged straight into an amp that there's no pressing need for the compression that so many 12-string players swear by.

The phrase ‘electric 12-string’ inevitably evokes the chiming Rickenbacker sounds of George Harrison and Roger McGuinn but play Fender’s version for a few moments and you’ll hear more than a few classic tones that are equally as recognisable.

The Electric XII is much easier to play and far more versatile than the Rickenbacker 12s we’ve encountered, and it doesn’t box you into sonic corners you’ll never jangle your way out of. The Fender design would certainly be our choice if we had to choose just one electric 12-string – and they don’t come much better than this example. G

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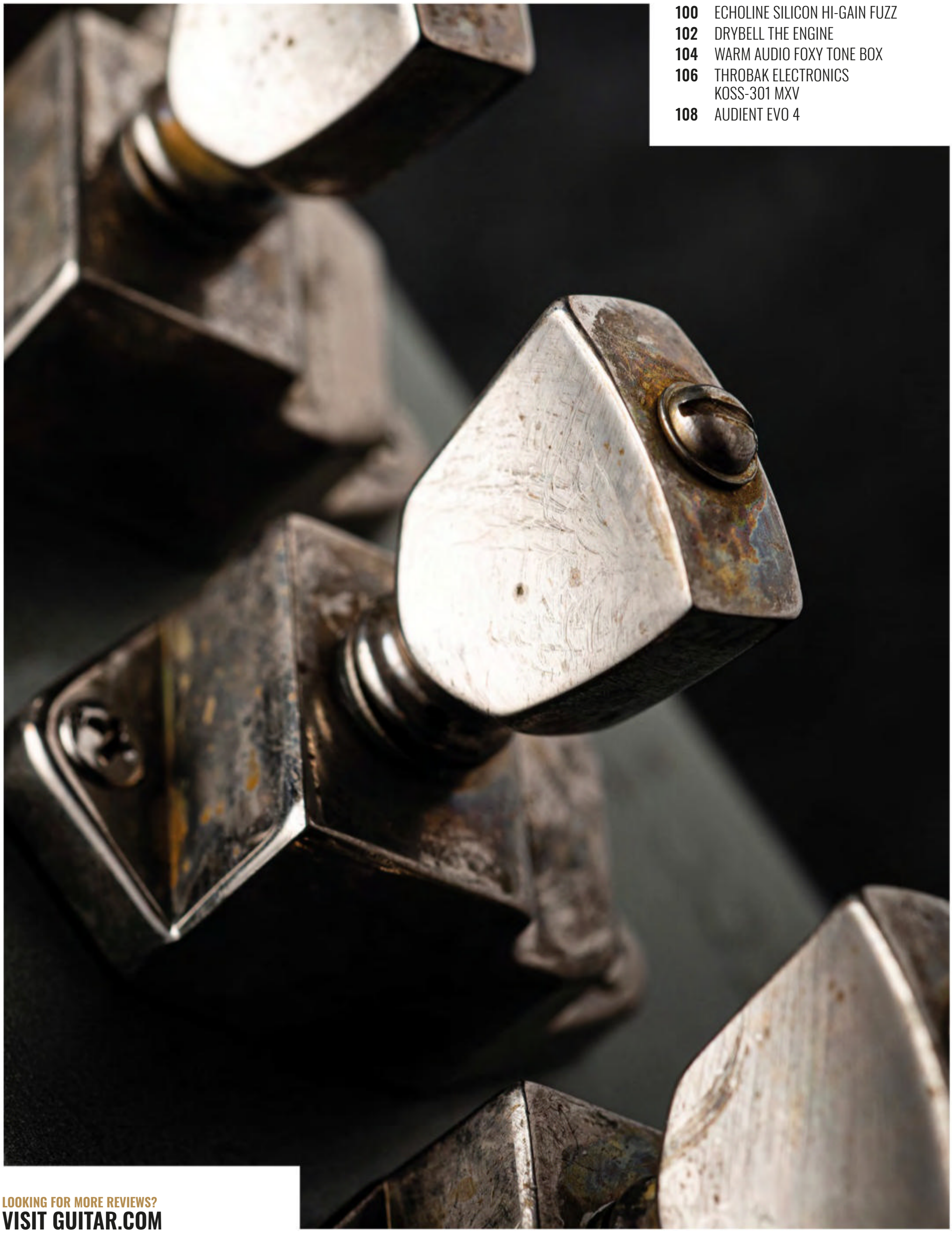

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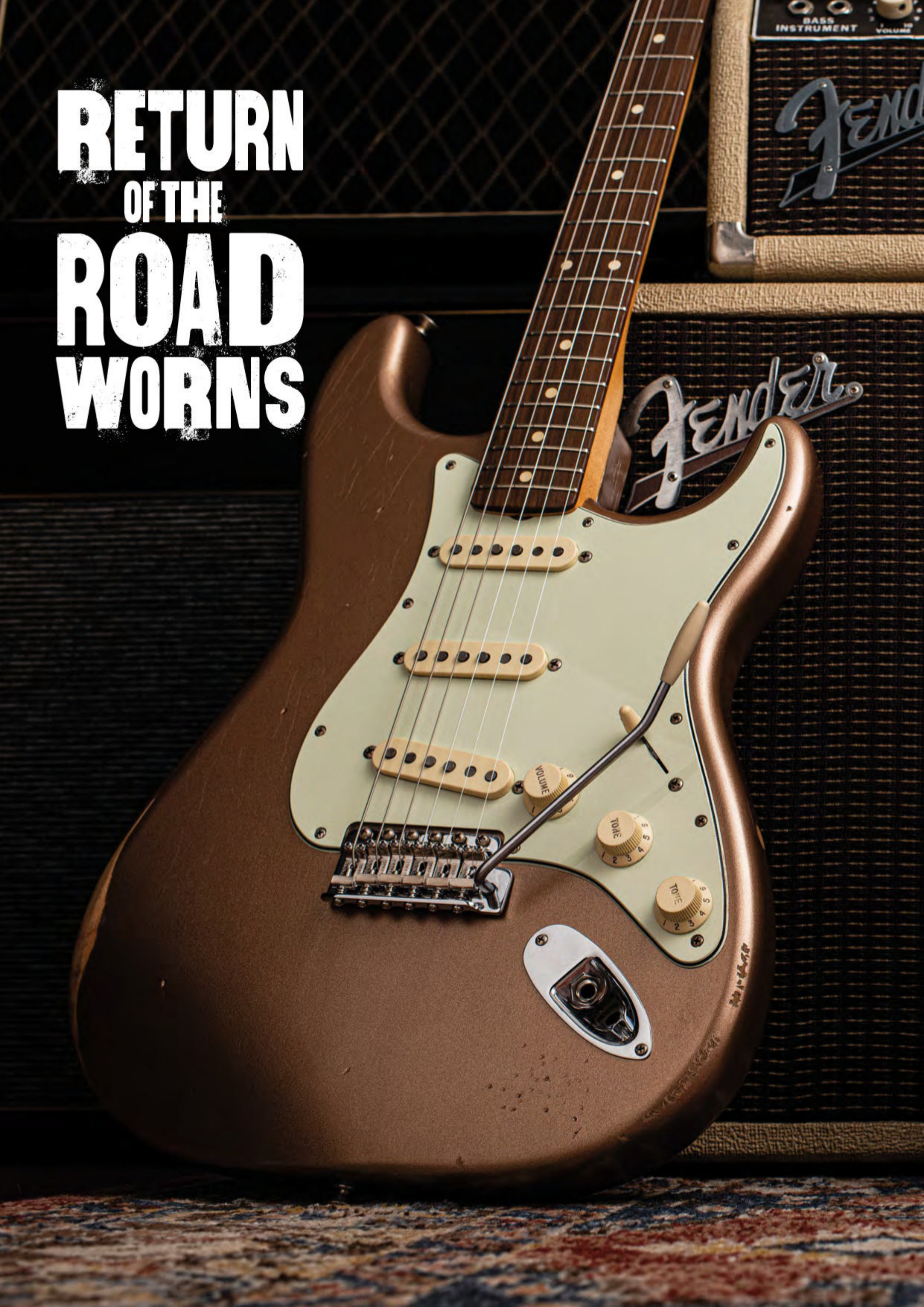


Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

FENDER

VINTERA ROAD WORN '50S TELECASTER & '60S STRATOCASTER

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Fender's Road Worn guitars return with improved relic'ing and an attractive range of custom colours. Is this the no-brainer guitar purchase of 2020?

Forget Trump, Brexit and COVID-19. A quarter of a century on from Winter NAMM 1995, when Fender first introduced Relic guitars to the world, factory ageing is still the topic most likely to set guitar forums and social media ablaze.

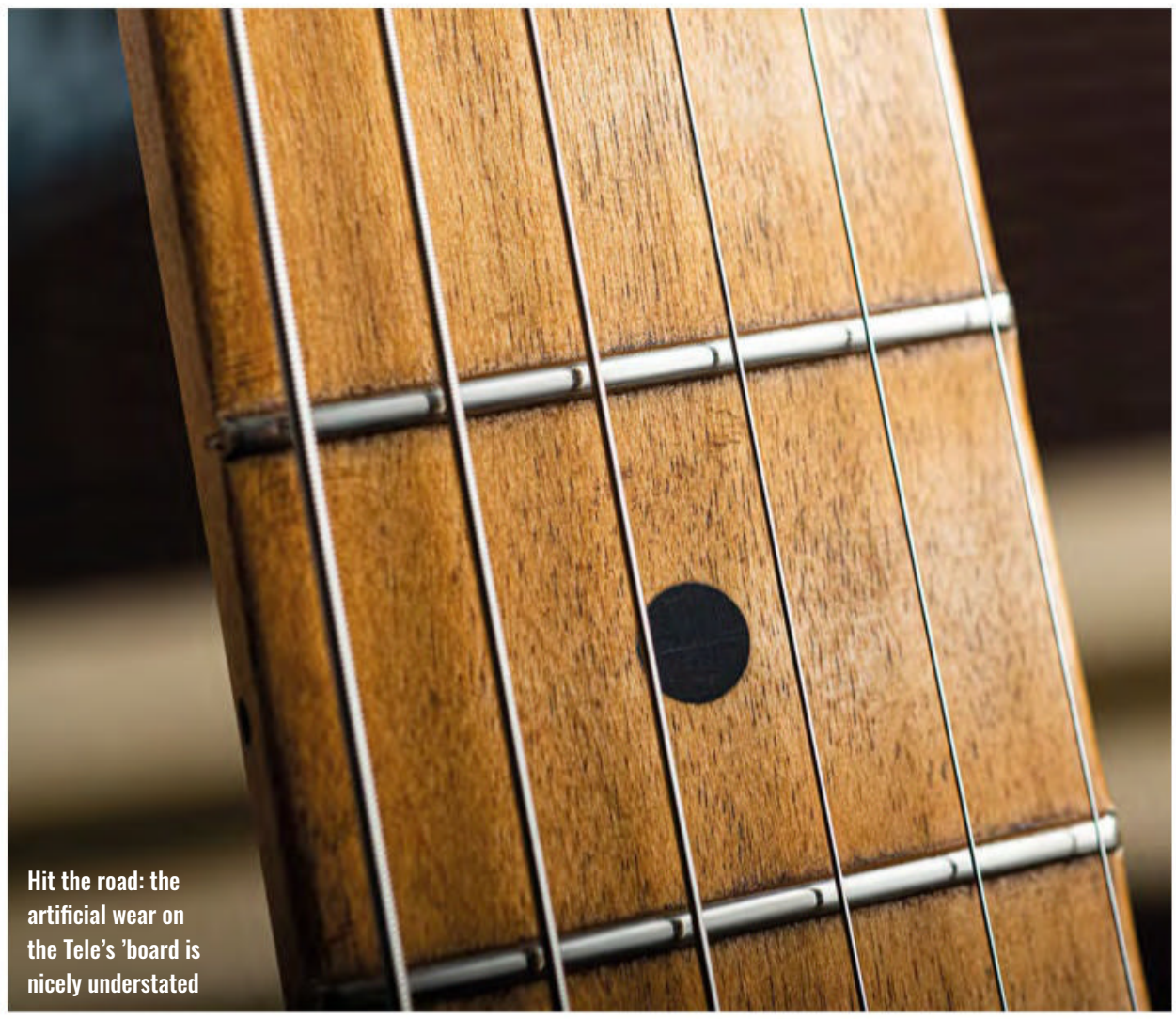
Present and correct: both the Road Worn Tele and Strat sport vintage-style tuners

Although Relics have been both a massive success story for Fender and enormously influential throughout the wider industry – everything from effects pedals to capos can now be purchased with a distressed finish – there's no doubt that a vocal minority in the guitar community prefers its wear and tear to be the result of years of hard gigging. That's all well and good but what if you don't have the funds for a vintage instrument or the inclination to wait several decades for the boxfresh nitro finish on your new guitar to take on a vintage patina?

Fender's original Road Worn series arrived in 2009, making the played-in look and feel of an old Strat or Tele much more accessible to the masses by taking the ageing know-how of the Custom Shop and applying it to production-line guitars made in the company's Ensenada factory in Baja California, Mexico.

Road Worns briefly disappeared from the Fender catalogue in 2019 following the reorganisation of the company's Mexican-made reissues into a new Vintera line consisting only of guitars with pristine gloss polyester finishes. But we didn't have to wait too long for Road Worns to return.

The first 2020 batch of Vintera Road Worn models features '50s and '60s Strats, a '50s Tele and a '70s Telecaster Deluxe. Offsets and a '60s Telecaster have yet to be announced but will almost certainly follow in 2021. A 60th Anniversary Road Worn Jazz Bass was also unveiled for 2020 – we'll take the Firemist Silver version with tortoiseshell 'guard, please – but there's no new Road Worn P-Bass just yet.



Hit the road: the artificial wear on the Tele's 'board is nicely understated

Back in 2009, UK retail prices for Road Worn models started at £859, so the £999 price tag on both of our review guitars feels very reasonable – we'd wager that the cost of most commodities has risen by a great deal more than 16 per cent over the past 11 years, even if many people's wages haven't.

As with the other models in the Vintera series, rather than slavishly recreating instruments from specific model years, Fender has amalgamated a variety of features to evoke the spirit of an era.

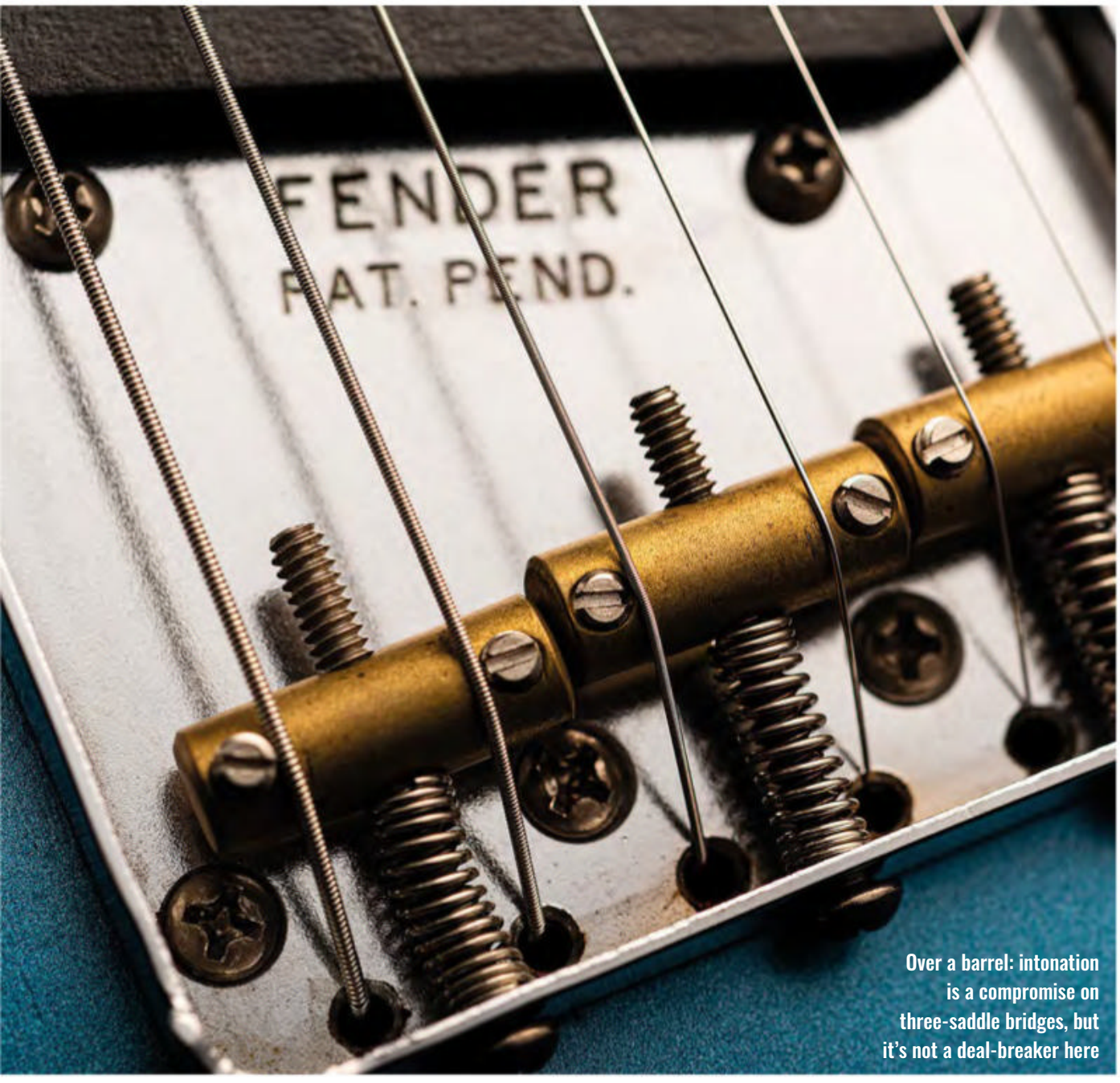
The company has certainly had fun with the new (or rather, old) finish options, offering custom colours that originally appeared in the 1960s on its '50s Strat and Tele. Our '50s Telecaster comes in a vivid shade of Lake Placid Blue, a colour that featured on the cover of the Cadillac catalogue in 1958 and was officially added to the Fender line-up when the custom colour chart was first issued in 1960.

Firemist Gold was a 1965 debutante, and it features here on the '60s Stratocaster.

Battle scars: tasteful scuffs and scratches adorn the Tele's Lake Placid Blue body

KEY FEATURES

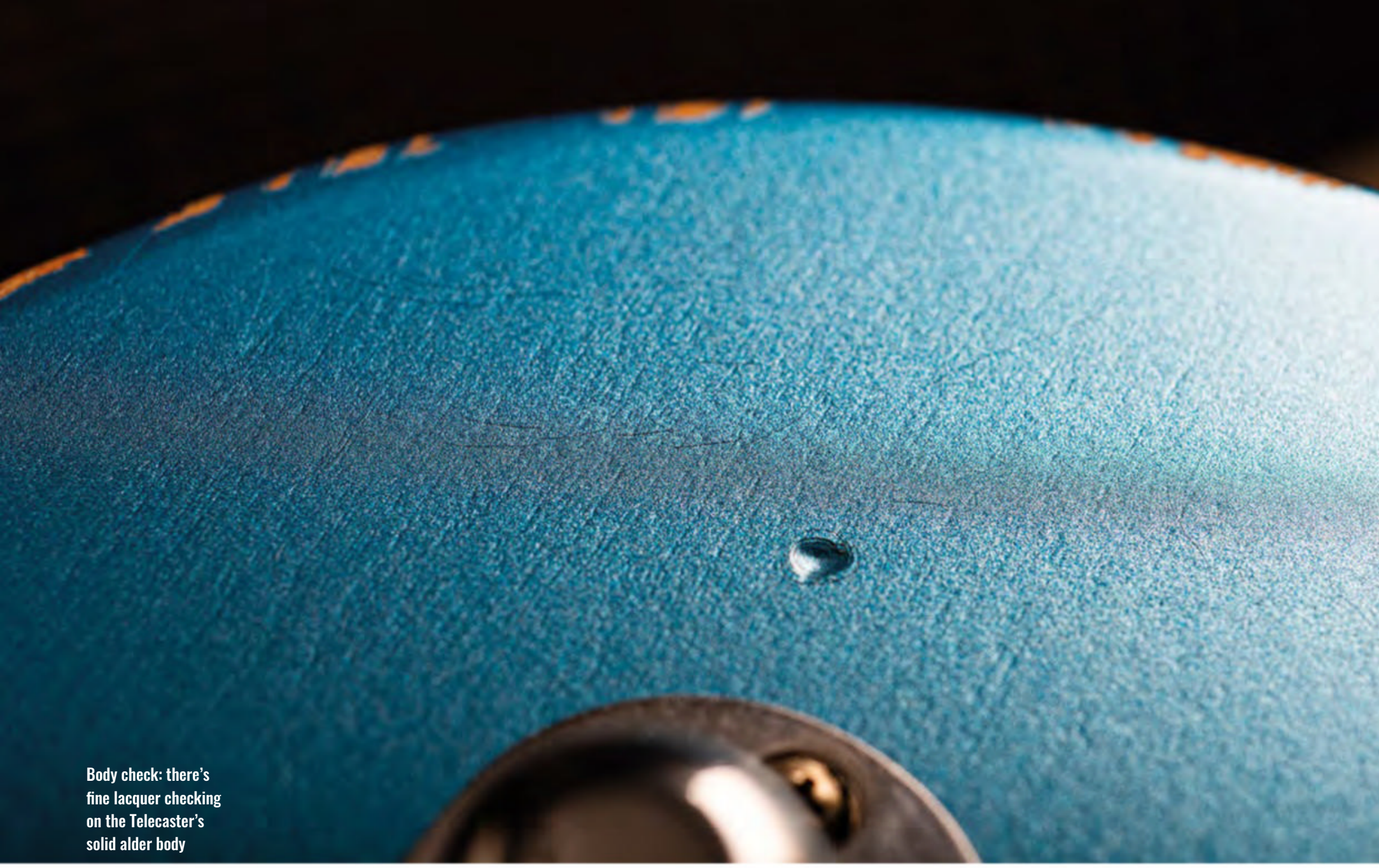
FENDER VINTERA ROAD WORN '50S TELECASTER
PRICE £999 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 7.25" fretboard radius, 21 vintage tall frets, black dot inlays, synthetic bone nut
HARDWARE 3x brass saddle hardtail bridge, vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x vintage-style '50s Hot Tele single-coil pickups, 3-way blade selector switch, master volume, master tone
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.7mm at nut, 51.3mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 23.3mm at first fret, 24.6mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.1mm at nut, 53.9mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.4kg/7.5lb
FINISH Road Worn Lake Placid Blue (as reviewed) or Vintage Blonde nitrocellulose
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT fender.com



Over a barrel: intonation is a compromise on three-saddle bridges, but it's not a deal-breaker here

In combination with the earlier-style mint-green scratchplate, it's undoubtedly an attractive look. Some may baulk at the light-brown appearance of the pau ferro 'board and long for the rich dark-chocolate hue of a Brazilian rosewood original. But remember, Fender briefly experimented with alternatives to rosewood in the early-to-mid 1960s. We've seen a vintage Jazzmaster in the flesh with a padauk veneer 'board that looked very similar in tone to the slab of pau ferro used here.

Both Firemist Gold and Lake Placid Blue metallics were originally Lucite (acrylic), though you've doubtless seen vintage examples of Lake Placid Blue on which the clear nitrocellulose top coat has yellowed to give the guitar a green hue almost indistinguishable from Ocean Turquoise. The Road Worn finishes here are described as nitrocellulose lacquer and both are obviously very thin, with visible grain sinkage on both bodies.



Body check: there's fine lacquer checking on the Telecaster's solid alder body

As for the ageing itself, Fender has opted for tasteful rather than trashed, with scuffed edges, simulated forearm wear, small dings and areas of fine lacquer checking on the bodies and headstocks. They appear a little more nuanced than the original Road Worn finishes of a decade ago, and Max Gutnik, Fender's VP of electric guitars, basses and amplifiers, agrees.

"A great deal of thought and care was put into the Road Worn finishes," says Gutnik. "We've evolved the process based on our experience and that, we feel, has resulted in our best-looking and feeling Road Worn instruments yet. With the more involved finishing process, there is of course more room for error, so it's critical that each instrument receives the attention to detail and care it needs to meet our standards. We put a lot of importance on quality and consistency."

During previous encounters with Vintera models, we've been impressed by the neck shapes. That trend continues here. The Telecaster's neck carve has more pronounced shoulders than many of the original Blackguard necks we've played but it's still a satisfying palmful and not overly hefty. While the edges of the 7.25-inch radius fingerboard don't quite possess the sumptuous rollover of a 1950s neck, they are nicely broken in. Vintage radius or not, we struggle to make the Telecaster choke out, even with bends that stretch the boundaries of taste.

The simulated wear on the maple 'board stops short of looking too heavy or formulaic, while the back has a nicely worn feel with minimal drag. A few slightly rough spots take no more than two minutes to smooth out with some 12,000-grit Micro-Mesh but the need for minor fettling in order to get the best out of a guitar shouldn't be regarded as a deficiency at this price point.

Precious metals: the Strat's vibrato operates smoothly and tuning stability is impressive

As on the Road Worn Tele, the area in which the back of the Stratocaster's headstock flows into the neck features crisper and more defined lines than the soft transition of a vintage instrument. But this doesn't impact on player comfort at the cowboy end.

KEY FEATURES

FENDER VINTERA ROAD WORN '60S STRATOCASTER
PRICE £999 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 7.25" radius pau ferro slab fretboard, 21 vintage tall frets, white dot inlays, synthetic bone nut
HARDWARE Vintage-style 6-saddle synchronised vibrato bridge, vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS 3x vintage-style '60s Hot Strat single-coil pickups, 5-way blade selector switch, master volume, 2x tone (neck/middle and bridge)
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.9mm at nut, 51.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.9mm at first fret, 24.6mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.1mm at nut, 54.8mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.3kg/7.3lb
FINISH Road Worn Firemist Gold (as reviewed) or Lake Placid Blue nitrocellulose
LEFT-HANDERS No

Arm's length: decades of forearm wear can be yours in an instant

The Strat's neck profile is much more era-specific than the Telecaster's, with a slim oval C-shape tapering into a fuller profile as you pass the fifth fret. It's just as comfortable a neck shape today as it was in the mid-1960s – especially if you're a thumb-over-the-top player – and we're in the Goldilocks zone for rhythm and lead work alike.

Though the fretwire is described as Vintage Tall on the spec sheets for both models, the Stratocaster's fret ends have been rounded with a little more finesse and the fret height feels a fraction lower, offering a smoother ride than the Telecaster as a result. Again, the 7.25-inch radius doesn't seem to cause any significant issues when it comes to set-up, while the vintage-style vibrato floats beautifully straight out of the box and tuning stability is superb.

IN USE

Conventional wisdom dictates that a thin finish on a lightweight body makes for a lively and resonant guitar, and these instruments do nothing to challenge that notion. Weighing in at a very decent 7.5lb, the Telecaster is the heavier of the two guitars but its acoustic sustain and vibrancy are more impressive than plenty of considerably more valuable Teles we've played over the years. The Strat's acoustic qualities impress too, with its even decay crying out for a hypnotic throb of tremolo, a splash of spring reverb and judicious dips of the whammy bar. We're more than happy to oblige.

Both Road Worns are equipped with Fender's vintage-style Hot pickups but despite that 'hot' designation, output levels are still within vintage tolerances. During the testing process, we're able to compare the Road Worns to a couple of golden-era Fenders thanks to the loan of a 1954 Esquire converted to Tele spec with modern wiring, and a 1964 Strat. It's not quite like for like, of course – the '54 Esquire has an ash body and the Road Worn Tele's is alder, while the '64 Strat still has its original three-way switch – but it's certainly interesting to hear how these new guitars stack up in a studio context next to a couple of old campaigners.

Cutting edge: Fender's factory distress extends to faux wear on the headstock

All above board: Fender opted for pau ferro for the '60s Strat's fingerboard

The short answer is very well indeed, but it's by no means the one-sided fight you might have expected. Through a brown Deluxe, the Esquire has a rich complexity that's thick like molasses in the lower mids. It's an extraordinary rock rhythm tone but, when we switch to the Road Worn Tele, our engineer marginally prefers the new guitar. The grit is still present but there's a little more snap and presence, and it occupies less space in the mix.

The sustain characteristics are different too; when you leave single notes and chords hanging, the old guitar recedes smoothly out of the focal plane in a musical way, while the Road Worn seems hungrier for screen time, with sustaining notes sometimes almost outstaying their welcome in the foreground. It's somewhat inevitable that the younger instrument would be brasher and the older one mellower but it's fascinating to hear how this influences the way they behave in the mix with an otherwise identical signal chain.

It's a similar story when we switch to the Strats. The '64 has a woody depth that's tough to beat but the Road Worn model sports a spank and a percussive edge that excels in a leaner, wirier, funkier setting. If the battle-scarred sunburst '64 is Jimi and SRV, the Firemist Gold Road Worn is John Frusciante, Nile Rodgers and Mark Knopfler. That said, the bridge-pickup tone control stops things getting too scratchy and is a useful thickener, especially with overdrive.

Though we've focused on the guitars' performances in comparison with vintage instruments, it's important to emphasise that both are classic-sounding Fenders in their own right. Everybody's idea of the perfect Strat or Tele tone is different, and for the tweakers among us, the light weights, thin finishes and characterful neck profiles here provide an excellent platform for mods and upgrades. Whether you're a fan of the vintage aesthetic but are priced out of the pre-CBS Fender market – and, let's face it, that's most of us – or you're simply on the hunt for a vibey and inspiring workhorse electric with a familiar voice, look no further. The toughest decision to make is which colour to choose. GC

9/10 If you're a fan of vintage-style Strats and Teles, the new Road Worns offer the best bang for your buck in the Fender catalogue

TORN AND FRAYED

Fender kicked off the Relic craze in the mid-1990s but these days everyone is doing it. Here are eight other factory-aged electrics to try...

Friedman Vintage T **£2,699**

Novo Serus J £**3,399**

Eastman SB59/v **£1,999**

Xotic California Classic XTC-1 **£2,599**

Vintage V6 Icon **£379**

Rock 'N' Roll Relics Blackmore **£2,695**

Cort Sunset TC **£349**

ESP LTD TE-254 **£375**

TONE
VOLUME
TONE
VOLUME

GIBSON CUSTOM

’63 FIREBIRD V & ’65 NON-REVERSE FIREBIRD V

Guitar EDITOR’S CHOICE

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Gibson’s wall of custom-colour Firebirds was one of most arresting sights at NAMM 2020. We put a pair of these rare birds to the test

As detailed expertly by Tony Bacon on page 86 of this issue, the Gibson Firebird is one of several examples of an electric guitar design that was somewhat ahead of its time and only became truly iconic years after it had stopped rolling off the production line. It’s in good company, of course – the sunburst Les Paul Standard, Explorer and Flying V being three other McCarty-era creations that weren’t exactly runaway successes on launch – but whereas Fender’s misunderstood and long-unfashionable Jazzmaster eventually became a mainstream proposition, in the wild, the Firebird is still a rarer creature to behold.

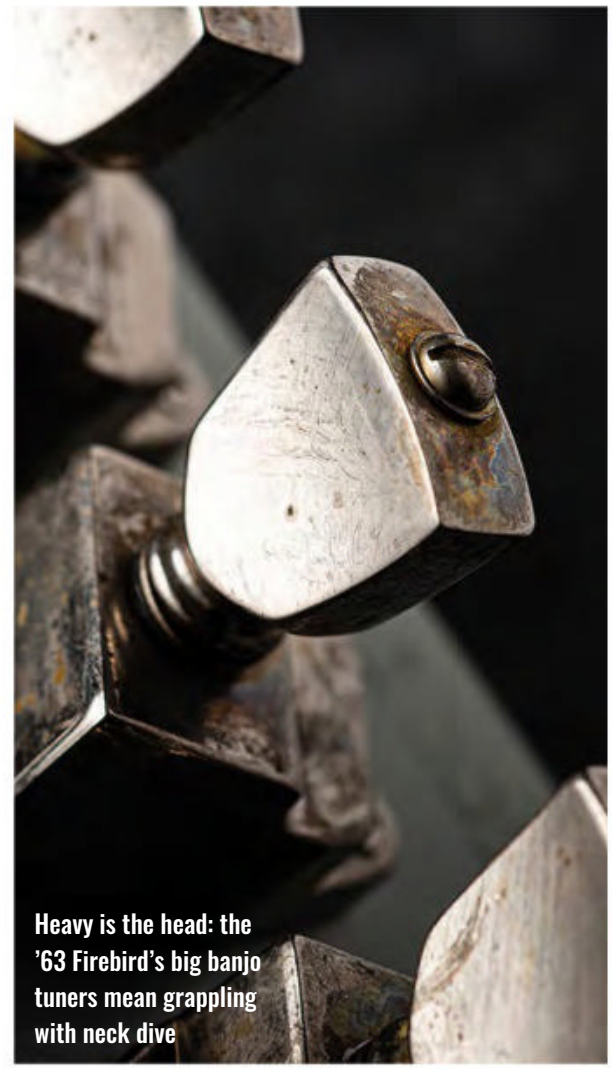
That’s not to say that it hasn’t made its mark over the years. Firebirds helped write history in the hands of Gatemouth Brown, Johnny Winter, Allen Collins and, briefly, Eric Clapton – and who can forget Phil Manzanera’s Cardinal Red 1964 Firebird VII? Our own Firebird fascination came courtesy of seeing Noel Gallagher pictured in front of an Orange stack with a Non-Reverse model during the *(What’s The Story) Morning Glory?* sessions, not to mention grainy photographs of Keith Richards and Brian Jones with a magnificent Firebird VII. Paul McCartney is even thought to have recorded the *Maybe I’m Amazed* guitar solo using the left-handed Non-Reverse Firebird he played extensively during his early solo career.

Today, between Gibson, Gibson Custom and Epiphone, there are six ’birds to choose from, the most accessible being Epiphone’s Inspired By Gibson Firebird at £549. Behind the scenes, the company has also been tied up in litigation with Warwick over the rights to the Firebird trademark in the EU, while in January, Gibson’s Winter NAMM booth included a wall of ultra-limited reverse and Non-Reverse Custom Shop Firebirds in an array of 1960s custom colours.

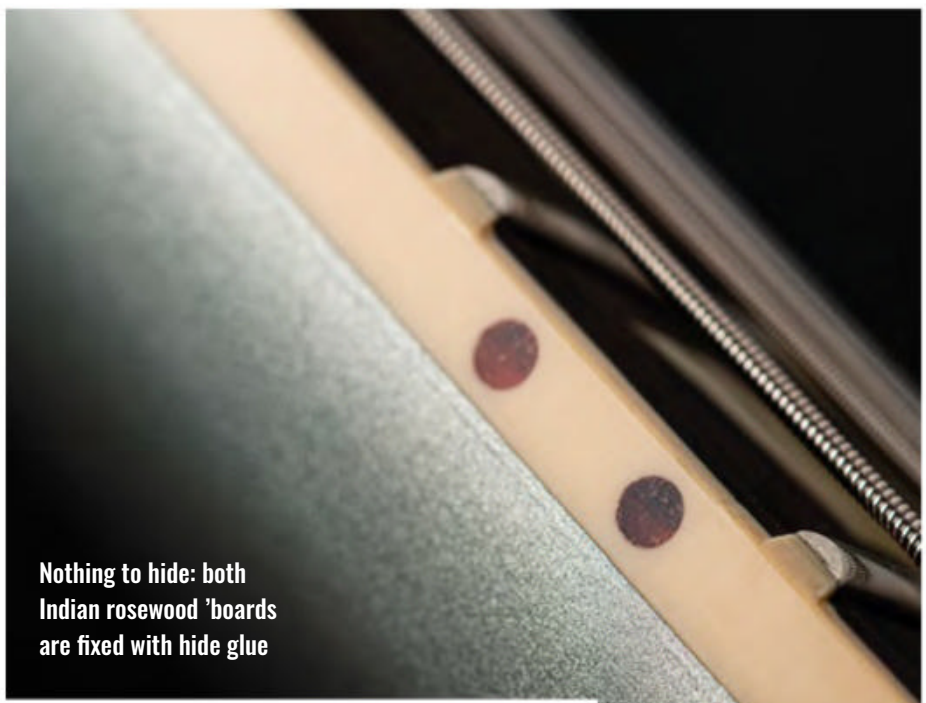
Unsurprisingly, they were some of the most photographed and talked about guitars at the show and now, thanks to our friends at Coda Music in Stevenage, we’ve got our hands on a pair of them. Silver Mist Poly and Heather Poly are two of the rarest of all Gibson finishes and your chances of seeing a vintage Firebird in either of these colours, let alone tracking one down and buying it, are extremely slim. Cosmetics aside, because our review models are equipped with the same pickups and Maestro vibrato units, it also provides a fascinating opportunity to compare the reverse-body model with the simpler design that superseded it.

Like Fender’s, Gibson’s custom colours originated in the automotive industry. Though the finishes here are listed as nitrocellulose lacquer VOS, both Heather Poly and Silver Mist Poly were originally Lucite with nitrocellulose clear coats (‘poly’ meant metallic in 1960s Gibson-speak, rather than being an abbreviation for polyester or polyurethane). Heather Poly first appeared on Cadillacs in 1962, while in 1959, Silver Mist Poly could be found in several General Motors divisions under a variety of names, such as Grecian Gray (Chevrolet), Silver Birch (Buick), Silver Metallic (Cadillac) and Silver Mist Gray (Pontiac).

Mists of time: Silver Mist Poly is one of Gibson's rarest custom-colour finishes



Heavy is the head: the '63 Firebird's big banjo tuners mean grappling with neck dive



Nothing to hide: both Indian rosewood 'boards are fixed with hide glue

Tail feathers: both 'birds boast Maestro Vibrola tailpieces

Winging it: the Alnico V Firebird pickups generate some fabulous tones

KEY FEATURES

'63 FIREBIRD V
PRICE £5,399 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in the US
BUILD 9-ply mahogany/walnut through-neck with mahogany body wings, bound Indian rosewood fingerboard with 12" radius, 22 medium-jumbo frets, aged cellulose nitrate trapezoid inlays, nylon nut
HARDWARE ABR-1 bridge with nickel-plated brass saddles, Maestro Vibrola tailpiece, deluxe banjo tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Alnico V Firebird pickups, 2x 500K CTS volume pots, 2x 500K CTS tone pots, 3-way toggle switch, hand-wired harness
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 43.1mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.7mm at first fret, 25.1mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.8mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 4.1kg/9.1lb
FINISH Silver Mist Poly
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT coda-music.com, gibson.com

Construction largely follows the classic blueprints. The Indian rosewood fingerboards and the Non-Reverse model's neck are attached with hide glue – good news for vintage obsessives, less so for those of us who avoid buying or consuming animal products – while the '63 Firebird V commands a considerably higher price on account of its trickier build, with a nine-ply walnut/mahogany through-neck, and a pair of mahogany wings creating the body's asymmetrical outline.

Though both instruments have ribcage contours, the Non-Reverse model's is more extensive and this, along with generous edge radiusing, makes for a more approachable and Fender-like feel. In 2019, when we shot Brian Ray's 1964 Cardinal Red Firebird V, we noticed that the red finish on the neck extended over the binding, almost to the edge of the fretboard, with white side dots presumably created by precise masking prior to spraying. On our reverse-body review guitar, standard tortoiseshell dots have been

Bird on the wire: the '65 is better balanced, perhaps thanks to its vintage-style tuners

Chemical reaction: the Non-Reverse's aged nickel hardware sets off its custom-colour finish

Birds of a heather: Heather Poly first appeared on Cadillacs in 1962

KEY FEATURES

'65 NON-REVERSE FIREBIRD V
PRICE £4,499 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in the US
BUILD One-piece mahogany body, glued-in mahogany neck, Indian rosewood fingerboard with 12" radius, 22 medium-jumbo frets, pearloid dot inlays, nylon nut
HARDWARE ABR-1 bridge with nickel-plated brass saddles, Maestro Vibrola tailpiece, vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Alnico V Firebird pickups, 2x 500K CTS volume pots, 2x 500K CTS tone pots, 3-way slider switch, hand-wired harness
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 42.8mm at nut, 52.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.1mm at first fret, 24.6mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.9mm at nut, 52.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.6kg/8.0lb
FINISH Heather Poly
LEFT-HANDERS No

installed in the exposed cream binding, while the full depth of the unbound rosewood fingerboard is clearly visible on the Non-Reverse model.

Strapped on, the unconventional and slightly left-shifted playing position of the reverse Firebird takes a little getting used to and, though their performance is impressively smooth and accurate, those big banjo tuners contribute to neck dive. Switching over to the Non-Reverse model, both the instrument's balance and fretting-hand position feel rather more familiar. That said, our favoured option is to relocate the strap button to the heel, which makes a Firebird hang from your body more like an SG or ES-335.

Upon close inspection, neither finish has been executed flawlessly but both guitars certainly look like a million dollars under lights, with their combination of unusual metallic hues and chemically aged nickel parts. There's also something undeniably appealing about the idea of owning a NAMM Show guitar that's been filmed and photographed by the world's guitar press.

IN USE

On balance we usually prefer the slightly more stripped-down and organic feel of an unbound fingerboard, so it's the Non-Reverse Firebird that's initially the more inviting of these two. Our 'birds are listed as having authentic '63 medium C and '65 slim C profiles respectively but both have a similar taper and there isn't a great deal of difference between them in terms of depth. The Non-Reverse model has more pronounced shoulders and a flatter back and the '63 a more elliptic carve. But this is something that will really come down to personal preference.

NAMM right: these guitars were the darlings of Gibson's NAMM 2020 showing

The Maestro Vibrola may not be the most sophisticated vibrato tailpiece ever designed but it certainly doesn't appear to be hindering acoustic sustain, as both guitars have it in abundance, though the Non-Reverse is the louder and fuller-sounding of the pair. It also returns to pitch surprisingly reliably and allows you to augment single notes and chords with beautiful Bisgby-style dips and shimmers.

Our amplified explorations begin with the '63, where we find the Silver Mist guitar replete with the sounds of dangerous rock 'n' roll, ranging from *Satisfaction*-era Stones to PJ Harvey circa *Stories From The City, Stories From The Sea* and beyond. It's a shame that the reverse-body Firebird is so often pigeonholed primarily as a slide guitar. Although it excels in that area thanks to its easy upper-fret access and the way that these pickups slice through a mix, there's so much more on offer here. The middle setting alone is capable of both springy Meters-esque funk and some of the sleaziest indie-rock tones around, and any concerns you might have about the reverse body's physical unwieldiness quickly evaporate when you begin to get lost in its myriad sonic possibilities.

Over to the Non-Reverse, then, and given that the '63 has so much character, it's a tough act to follow. Though plenty of a Firebird's personality traits come from its pickups, it is perhaps predictable that the more traditionally constructed model isn't quite as sonically dazzling as its revolutionary sibling, initially at least. There's a little more SG-like aggression in the Non-Reverse design's DNA, so we find ourselves gravitating towards grittier rock tones that range from the Faces to the Foo Fighters – it's certainly punchier and more focused in a way that suits powerchord riffs and palm-muted punk rhythm parts. And although we were initially concerned about pickup switching on the fly, using that slider switch quickly feels pretty natural, even if it does generate an audible 'thunk'.

This is a perfect example of how you can take two identical sets of pickups and almost identical components, drop them into two guitars with different physical attributes and experience very different amplified results. Which guitar would we take home? It's tough, because we love the look and feel of the Non-Reverse model, and in many ways it's a much more practical instrument. The heady tonal palette of the reverse-body Firebird, however, is just more alluring.

Expensive? Yes. As pricey as a custom-colour vintage original? Not even close. As literal showpiece models, both of these guitars may well find their way into the vaults of collectors. But we hope they get played regularly too – they deserve to. G

9/10 **Whichever version of the Firebird you favour, these guitars are toneful, collectible, and as cool as it gets**

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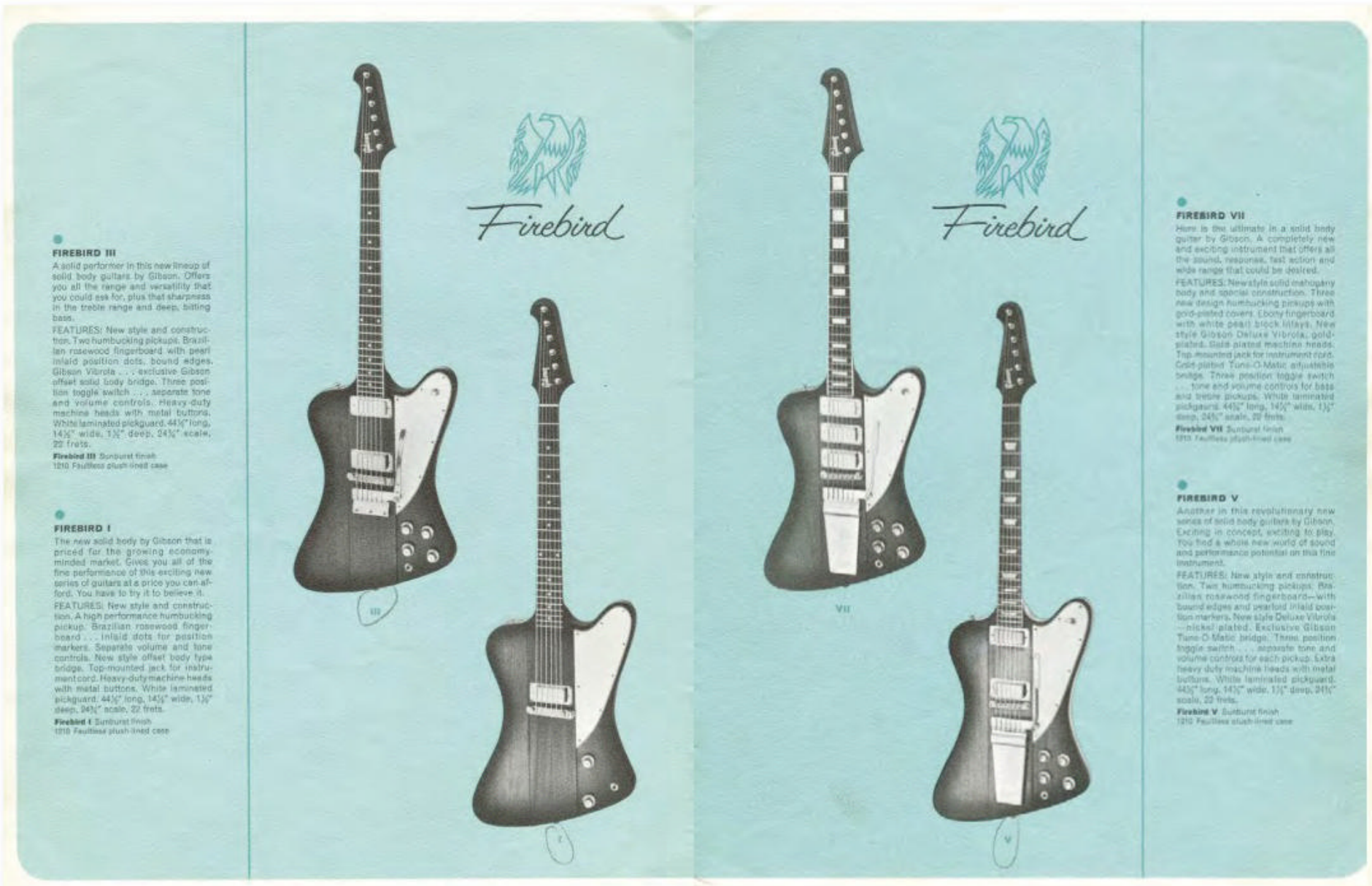
REVERSE ENGINEERING

With Fender dominating the solidbody market in the early 1960s, Gibson had to change gears to keep up. Enter automobile designer Ray Dietrich, a rainbow of custom colours and a complex build that was ahead of its time

WORDS TONY BACON
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

One evening in the early 1960s, Ted McCarty locked his office at the Gibson HQ in Kalamazoo and took a short drive into town to attend a talk by Ray Dietrich. Ray was a legendary car designer who'd worked in the American automobile industry for 50 years, and while Ted was interested to hear about that, he had another motive – and it had little to do with cars. Ray had established the idea of the custom coach-builder, designing and building exclusive car bodies for brands such as Lincoln, Packard, Duesenberg, and Ford. In 1960, at the age of 66, he'd retired to Kalamazoo.

The men met after the talk, and Ted asked Ray if he'd be interested in designing a guitar. As a result, Gibson hired him to devise a new solidbody electric line. The idea was to compete with Fender's growing dominance of the solidbody market. "We wanted another deal," Ted later told me, "something that our friend Fender couldn't make."



1965 saw the original reverse-body Firebird models (above) replaced in the Gibson catalogue by a simpler 'non-reverse' design (right)

The new Firebird line appeared in 1963, when Gibson announced "a completely new and exciting instrument that offers all the sound, response, fast action, and wide range that could be desired".

WINGS OF DESIRE

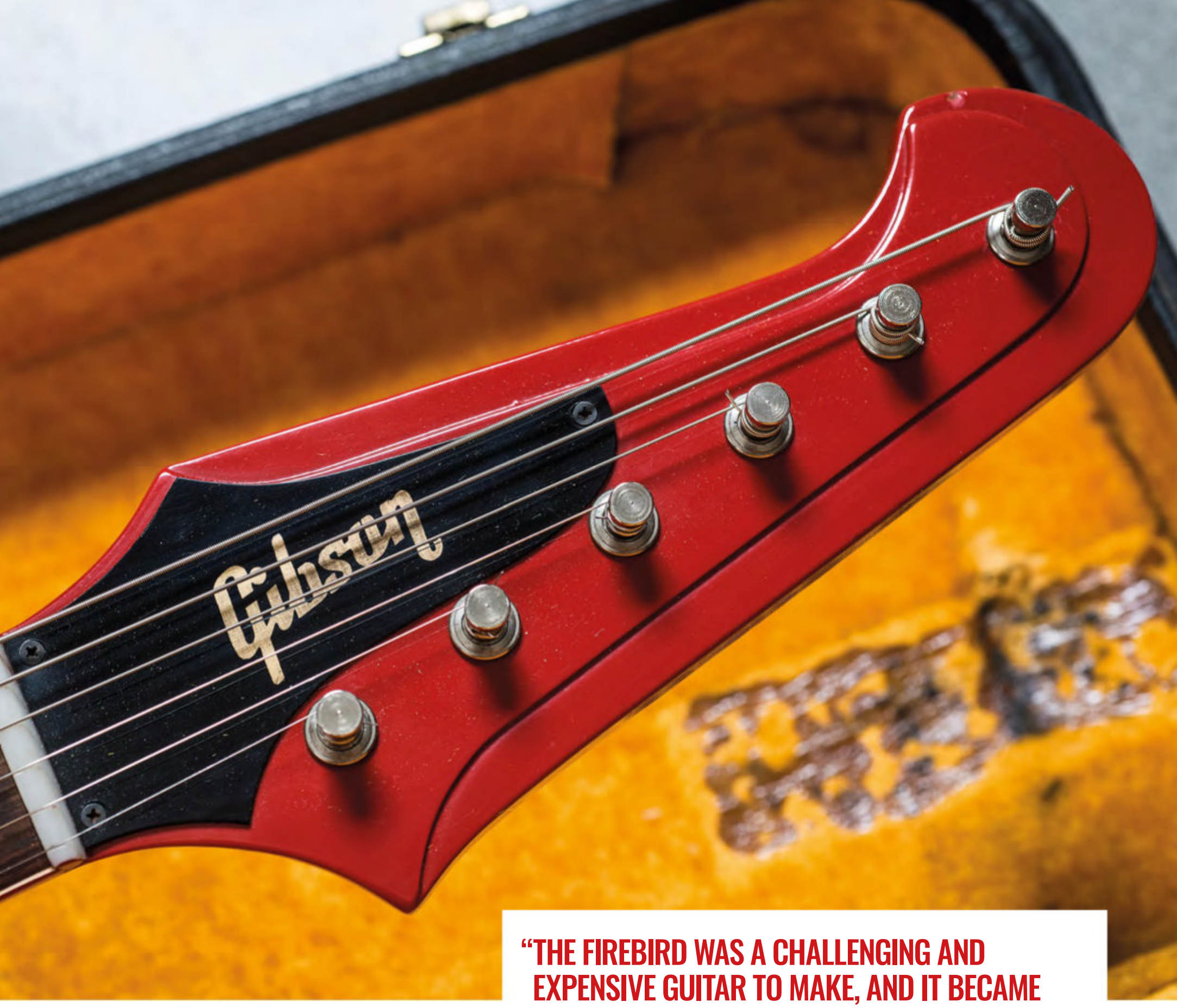
There were four Firebirds: the I, III, V and VII. Each had different appointments but followed the same overall design and build. They were the first Gibson solidbody models to make use of a through-neck construction. There was a central multi-laminate mahogany and walnut section running the length of the guitar, from headstock to strap button, which provided the neck and the mid portion of the body in a single unit. Two slightly thinner mahogany wings were glued on to complete the body shape, meaning the body's mid portion was stepped up higher than the wings, forming a sort of central shelf four inches wide, on which the pickups, bridge and tailpiece sat.

The body was sleek and asymmetrical. The elongated shape had a hornless upper section that made the lower horn seem to stick out further than it really did. The result was an almost-unbalanced but quite appealing look, leading to these originals becoming known as the 'reverse-body' or 'reverse' Firebirds.

The headstock had a sort of flipped Fender shape, although the low E string fed the furthest tuner, the opposite of Fender's scheme. The Kluson tuners were banjo-style high-ratio units, with the string anchors on the treble side of the head and the buttons protruding from the rear, hidden from the front. You had to reach around in an unfamiliar way to adjust them.

All the Firebirds came with special small humbuckers without adjustable polepieces. The two coils of each pickup were wound around alnico bar magnets, making for a toppier tone. The Firebird I had a single pickup (at the bridge), the III and V came with two, and the high-end VII had three.

The I was the only original Firebird that didn't have a vibrato as standard – the regular model had a simple wrapover bridge and tailpiece combination. The III had a stud-style bridge and a simple Gibson/Maestro Vibrola vibrato, while the V and VII came with a Tune-o-matic and a Deluxe Gibson/Maestro Vibrola. The metal hardware was nickel-plated on the I, III and V, and gold-plated on the VII.



“THE FIREBIRD WAS A CHALLENGING AND EXPENSIVE GUITAR TO MAKE, AND IT BECAME CLEAR THAT ENLISTING AN OUTSIDE DESIGNER WHO DIDN’T UNDERSTAND GUITAR PRODUCTION MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN SUCH A GOOD IDEA”

TECHNICOLOR DREAM

Brown-to-black sunburst was the regular finish but Gibson borrowed Fender’s custom-colour idea, even down to a colour chart with swatches and rich, vivid names. There was Cardinal Red, Ember Red, Frost Blue, Golden Mist poly, Heather poly, Inverness Green poly, Kerry Green, Pelham Blue poly, Polaris White, and Silver Mist poly (“poly” indicated a metallic finish). Many were close equivalents to Fender’s custom colours.

The Firebird models sold better than the Explorer ever did – though that wasn’t difficult – with the two-pickup III being the most popular. By the start of 1965, however, Gibson’s factory managers were running into issues. The Firebird was a challenging and expensive guitar to make, and it became clear that enlisting an outside designer who did not understand guitar production might not have been such a good idea after all.

In the factory, if a neck developed a fault, the through-neck design meant that a portion of the body was also lost. The intricate laminated through-neck, the carving and the tricky wiring added to production time and costs. Once the Firebirds got out into the world, they were prone to breakages at the head-neck junction, sometimes while still in the case, where the crucial portion was unsupported.

Gibson decided to pull the plug, at the same time drawing up a revised Firebird design with a simpler construction. Gibson’s story was that Fender had threatened to sue over the design of the reverse Firebirds, citing Fender’s existing offset-waist body on the Jazzmaster and Jaguar. Gibson said this was the reason it was forced to change the Firebird’s design. But this seems unlikely.

Fender was certainly irritated, publishing an ad for the Jazzmaster and Jaguar with the headline: “The Most Imitated Guitars In The World”. But Fender had little scope for legalities. It had only a simple design patent for the Jazzmaster, and it described the Jazz and Jag’s Offset Contour Body as “patent pending”. The Fender story was perhaps a convenient cover behind which Gibson could hide its financial and practical motives for changing the Firebird design.

Vintage examples such as this 1963 Firebird III are now highly prized, while today's Gibson range features several Firebird models

"WE HAD PRODUCTION PROBLEMS. WE HAD PERSONNEL PROBLEMS. WE HAD UNION PROBLEMS. WE HAD PROBLEMS THAT WOULDN'T END"

NON-REVERSE GEAR

The new Firebirds arrived in 1965, two years after the model's debut, now with a slightly more conventional body shape, as if the original design had been flipped upwards and over – hence their 'non-reverse' nickname. Gone was the complicated through-neck and body shelf, replaced instead with Gibson's conventional glued-in neck. The pickups on the two cheaper models, the I and III, were regular P-90 single-coils, and the headstock was more Fender-like too, with regular tuners that meant no more awkward reach-arounds.

The new Firebirds appeared on the June 1965 price list, and a price-drop was apparent. The final reverse Firebirds had listed at $500 for the VII, $360 for the V, $280 for the III, and $215 for the I. But the new non-reverse line was notably cheaper at $379.50 for the VII, $289.50 for the V, $239.50 for the III, and $189.50 for the I.

However, the price cut and design changes were not enough to stop a further decline in Firebird sales during the rest of the 1960s. Gibson finally dropped them too, at the end of the decade. Stan Rendell was Gibson's new president, and he summarised the scene that faced him. "We had all kinds of quality problems," he told me. "We had production problems. We had personnel problems. We had union problems. We had problems that wouldn't end."

The real problem with the Firebirds was that they were ahead of their time. As with the Explorer and its companion the Flying V, it was only later that the true worth of a classic Firebird would become apparent.

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PETE THORN SIGNATURE SERIES

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

A rock 'n' roll machine at heart, with switching options that might make it the ultimate guitar for session players

While Pete Thorn is perhaps best known for his insightful YouTube demos, he's also a highly respected and successful session musician in his own right, and has toured and recorded with the likes of Chris Cornell, Don Henly and Melissa Etheridge. Pete's long association with California-based brand Suhr stretches back 10 years and includes the development of both a signature amplifier and pickups.

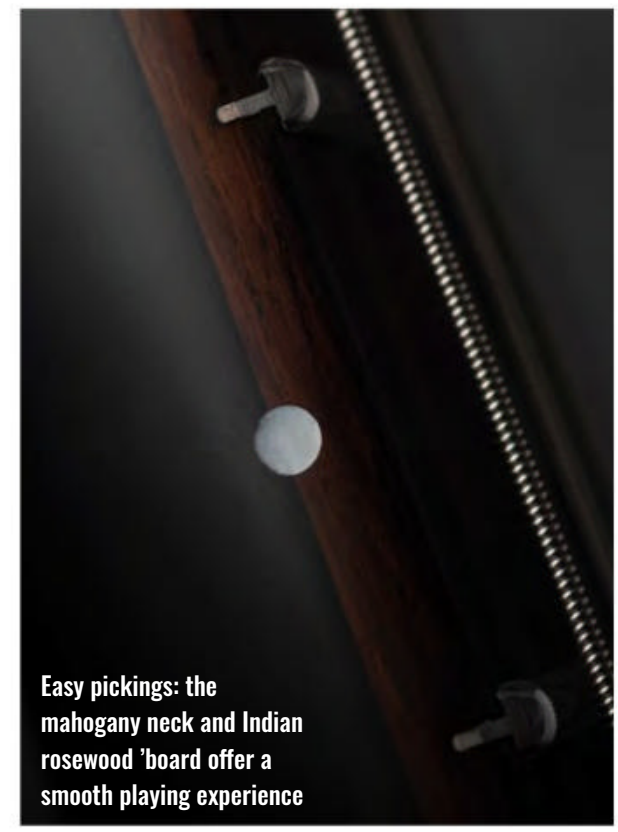
However, the seeds wouldn't be sown for a signature guitar until 2013, when Pete was invited to the Suhr factory in Lake Elsinore to shoot a video for the company's Riot Reloaded distortion pedal.

"I went out there and didn't take a guitar with me," says Pete, "so I picked up something they had there called the Mahogany Deluxe. It was their Standard body shape: 25.5-inch bolt-on neck, mahogany body with a maple top, rosewood fingerboard, and mahogany neck. I loved the guitar. The tone was fantastic. I thought, 'What if I ordered a guitar like this but specced out a custom one?'"

Retrospectively, that custom order would become the prototype for the PT Signature Series. "They called and said, 'Hey, you know that guitar you got? Would you consider making that a signature model?'"

Pete knew his perfect working and gigging guitar would be an amalgam of a Strat-type and a Les Paul, as those are the two models he swaps between most often during live shows. His previous custom guitar, the Suhr Standard, would provide the foundation, with its chambered mahogany/maple body and S-type outline.

Paint it black: the headstock features Suhr's locking tuners



Easy pickings: the mahogany neck and Indian rosewood 'board offer a smooth playing experience

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £3,299 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string double-cutaway electric solidbody, made in the US
BUILD Chambered mahogany body with plain maple cap and scraped binding, bolt-on satin-finished mahogany neck with 10-14" compound radius Indian rosewood fingerboard, 22 jumbo stainless-steel frets
HARDWARE Suhr locking tuners, Wilkinson WVS130 locking saddle vibrato bridge
ELECTRONICS Suhr Thornbucker+ (bridge) and Thornbucker (neck) with raw nickel covers, 5-way blade pickup selector, volume and tone control (push/pull on tone to activate bridge in parallel)
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.6mm at nut, 52.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.3mm at 1st fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.5mm at nut, 53.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.4kg/7.5lb
FINISHES Ocean Turquoise Metallic (as reviewed), Black, Vintage Gold, Garnet Red
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT suhr.com

The most obvious difference between the Standard and the Signature Series model is the pickup surrounds. Suhr direct-mounts the pickups in its Standard and Modern ranges but Pete prefers the look of pickup rings. Surprisingly, the Signature Series model's neck is not a custom carve but an 'even C slim' profile selected from the existing Suhr catalogue.

"The intention from the outset was to create a new carve," says Pete. "But the even C slim was a neck that John Suhr worked on at Fender. It was intended to be a comfortable C that worked for a lot of players, and he encouraged me to check out. So I did and, sure enough, I liked it!"

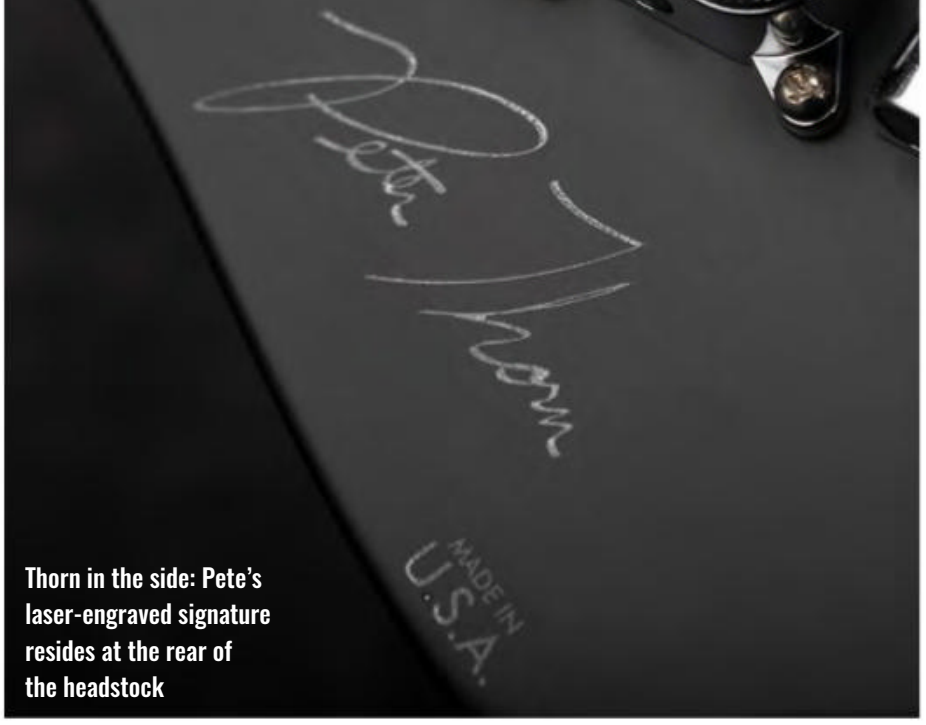
Much like the PRS 'Wide Thin' neck shape, Suhr's nomenclature is also something of a misnomer, as in practice it proves to be more of a comfortably fulsome C. The black satin finish on the back of the neck is almost frictionless and, in combination with the divinely rolled fingerboard edges, the neck is sympathetically supportive of any fretting hand position.

The initial run of PT Signature Series models featured the Gotoh 510 bridge. In 2018, however, following an encounter with Trev Wilkinson at the NAMM Show, Pete switched to a Wilkinson WVS130 unit with locking saddles.

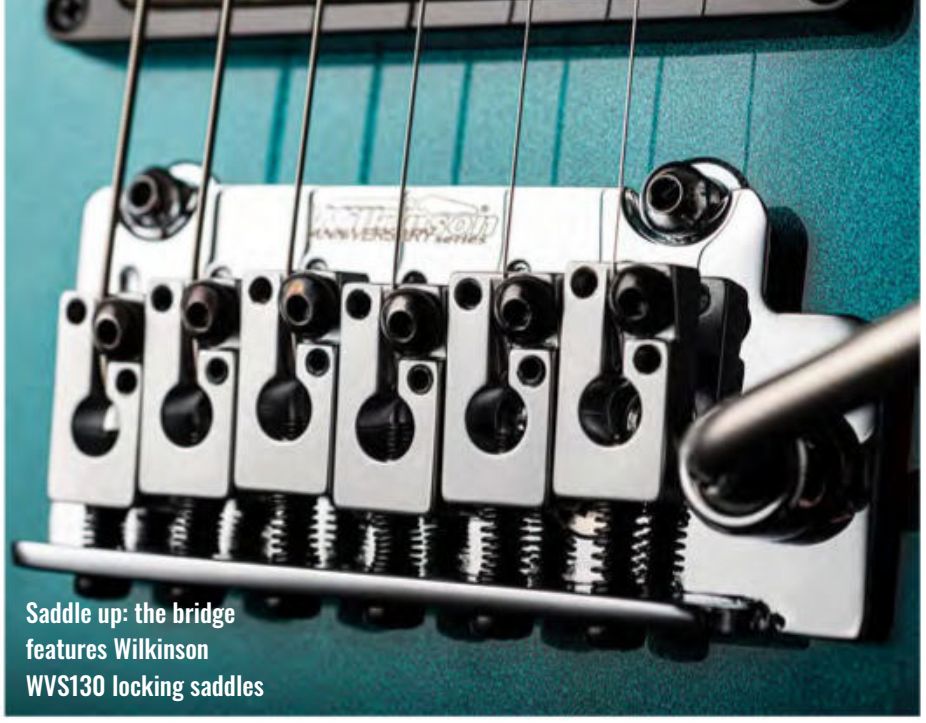
"I'd heard that Trev Wilkinson was working on a bridge that had locking saddles on it, similar to what you would see on a Floyd Rose," says Pete. "John [Suhr] had actually done experiments and found that the strings that have the least tension going over the saddle are the low E and G, and these pick up off the saddle the most when using the vibrato bar. It made a lot of sense that tuning instability could arise from the bridge saddles."

Unlike Floyd Rose saddles, Wilkinson's solution sees hardened steel saddles with clamp screws anchor the strings at the front,

Raw food diet: Pete's Thornbucker pickups are fitted with raw nickel covers



Thorn in the side: Pete's laser-engraved signature resides at the rear of the headstock


Saddle up: the bridge features Wilkinson WVS130 locking saddles

which should eliminate any repositioning of the string at the intonation point while using the whammy bar or bending strings. In theory, this should help reduce tuning stability issues, and we certainly struggle to put the guitar out of tune during the course of our testing.

IN USE

Upon plugging in, the first thing we notice is that the five-way blade selector is wired unconventionally. Positions one and three select the bridge unit and the neck-and-bridge combination, respectively, while position two selects the inner coils of both Thornbuckers. Position four selects the full neck humbucker, while position five is where you'll find the neck pickup in split mode.

Initially, this proves confusing when attempting to switch quickly between the bridge and neck pickups during lead passages. However, with riffs and chords in the mix, we find ourselves bypassing the neck unit's full humbucker mode deliberately, favouring the percussive response and extra definition of the split-coil tone.

The Thornbucker+ bridge pickup is meaty with a well-balanced midrange. It's responsive to the onboard volume control and, when running wide open, maintains its clarity despite the gain we throw at it. Pull up the tone pot and you get the bridge humbucker in parallel. Again, we eschew full humbucking mode in favour of a tone more akin to a traditional single-coil, albeit in this instance with the added bonuses of hum cancelling and additional grunt.

This may be a signature model tailored to an artist's specific needs but – such is the versatility that busy session players such as Pete Thorn demand – it's also a compelling instrument that delivers an extraordinary range of high-quality humbucking and single-coil-style tones, as well as a refined playing experience. There's no such thing as one-size-fits-all in the guitar world but, for the modern player, this is pretty close. G

9/10 **An extremely well-designed professional-grade instrument, flawlessly constructed and as versatile as it gets**

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Music Man Sabre **£3,399**

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Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

MATCHLESS
LAUREL CANYON 112R

WORDS HUW PRICE

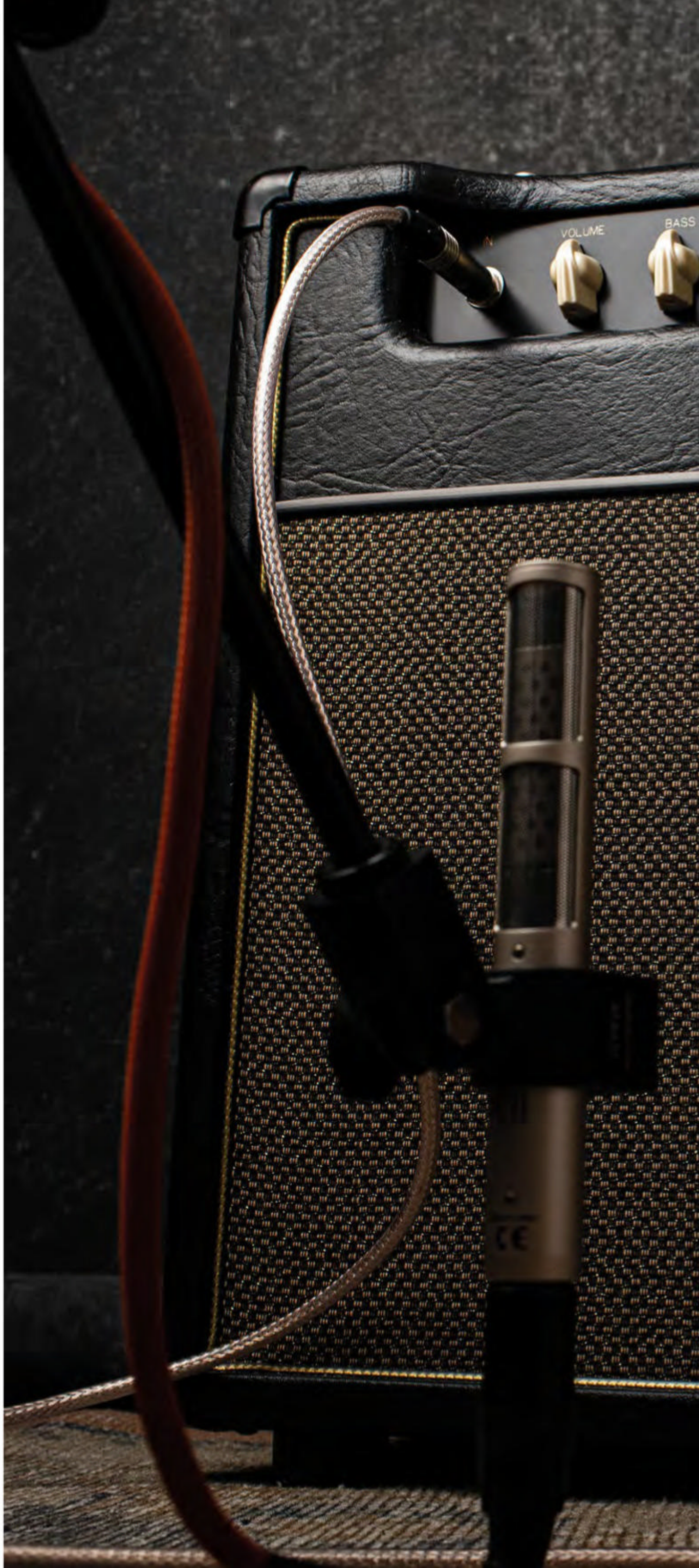
The king of British-inspired boutique amplifiers debuts its first 6V6 circuit – and it's every bit as good as you'd expect

When Matchless Amplifiers launched in 1989, the company caused a sensation and lit the blue touch paper under the boutique amplifier scene. The original Matchless models were built around EL84 and EL34 power valves and influenced by classic British designs but the new Laurel Canyon has been inspired by sounds and circuit designs that are closer to home for the Californian amp company.

"It's our very first 6V6 amp," Matchless chief operating officer Phil Jamison told Dave Hunter earlier this year. "I've done a 20-watt version with two 6V6s, and I just built our first 40-watt with four of them. It's kind of a spin-off on what we're famous for, but it's got a midrange control instead of it being fixed. I've changed the circuit for a specific sound, kind of that crash-and-burn 1966 thing. It nails the old Neil Young stuff. I was really going for the whole essence of the Laurel Canyon sound, of players back in the late '60s and '70s who were in that scene. Right now it's one of my favourite amps, just because it's something different. It's such a departure from that EL84 sound, and it doesn't sound like [an EL34-based] Clubman or a Chieftain either. It's got its own thing."

Our review amp comes in a compact and extremely sturdy 1x12 combo configuration complete with an effects loop and onboard footswitchable spring reverb with a two-spring tank and a pair of 12AX7s for drive and recovery.

The circuit may be a departure in some respects but, elsewhere, the Laurel Canyon is every inch a Matchless, with stellar point-to-point wiring, a steel chassis, a heavy Baltic birch plywood cabinet and a custom-voiced UK-made Celestion Heritage G12H30. The moody black and gold cosmetics here are extremely classy but buyers can spec their preferred combination of cabinet covering, faceplate and grille cloth.



MID
TREBLE
MASTER
REVERB
Laurel
Canyon
MATCHLESS
OPERATE
MATCHLESS

Grand canyon: with its mid control and master volume, this amp is hugely flexible

IN USE

Matchless' trademark light show comes for free, with the logo illuminating when you flick the power switch and the control panel lighting up when the Laurel Canyon is taken out of standby mode. Aside from looking fantastic, you're also sure to have no problem finding pedals and cables stashed inside the cabinet on a dimly lit stage or in a dingy rehearsal space.

It takes considerable skill and technical nous to make valve amps run as quietly as this one does, and the noise floor is remarkably low, even with the reverb control turned all the way up. Meanwhile, it quickly becomes clear that the key to unlocking the Laurel Canyon's tonal range is approaching the equalisation controls with your ears rather than your eyes.

The controls have such a powerful effect, your default settings might not produce the anticipated results. The EQ is also interactive, and the mid control's centre frequency is higher than might be expected.

In practice, this means you can actually turn the treble down fully and still dial in more than enough brightness using the middle control. The interesting bit is the way the overdrive increases along with the added midrange, much like the way in which winding up the tone control adds gain on a tweed Deluxe.

California dreamin': if the footswitchable reverb isn't enough ambience for you, there's always the effects loop

In contrast, the treble control provides brightness without adding gain. Turn the middle control down and raise the treble, and it's far closer to a fat 1960s black-panel Fender tone – especially with the bass knob providing a touch of boost.

The Laurel Canyon is capable of generating a lot of low-frequency power and yet it retains an impressive amount of focus and punch. The overdrive, meanwhile, almost sneaks up on you because the onset is so gradual and it sounds so natural. This gives you ample control over gain structure and helps the Laurel Canyon interface with all manner of pickups.

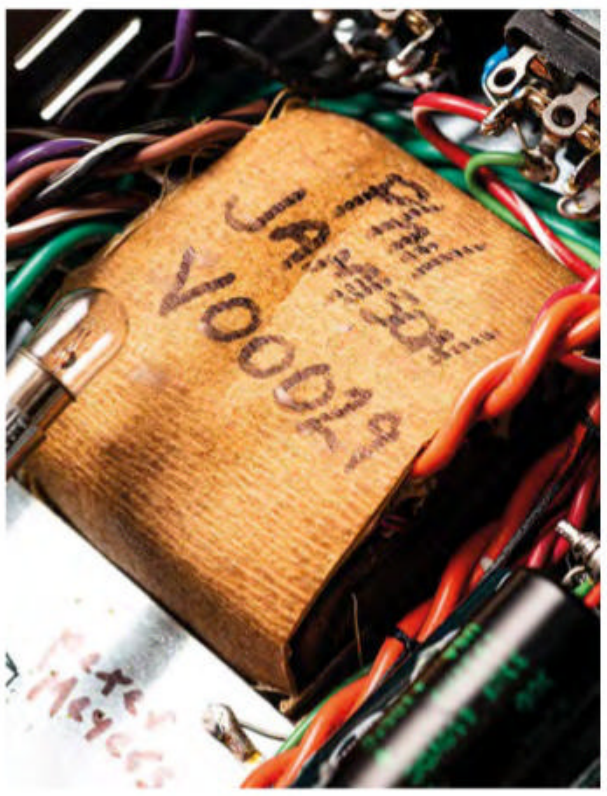
The clean headroom is impressive for a 20-watt amplifier, and a Telecaster will start overdriving when the volume control is set at about 11 o'clock. At about two o'clock, it begins to roar and, with the volume maxed, you get a heavy grit-free overdrive that's clear and articulate. Winding up the mids introduces more drive with a hint of crunch; rolling back the treble keeps things sweet.

Strictly speaking: the combo packs a custom-voiced, 8-ohm Celestion G12H30

Circuit exercises: the internals are wired point-to-point

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,995
DESCRIPTION Single-channel, tube-rectified open-back combo with effects loop and reverb, built in the US
POWER RATING 20W
VALVES 3x 12AX7, 2x 6V6, 1x 5AR4
CONTROLS Volume, bass, middle, treble, master, reverb
REAR PANEL Reverb footswitch input, effects send and return, 8-ohm and 4-ohm speaker outputs
LOUDSPEAKER 1x 12-inch custom-voiced 8-ohm Celestion Heritage G12H30
DIMENSIONS 533 x 470 x 248mm
WEIGHT 20.9kg/46lb
CONTACT matchlessamplifiers.com, rebellionguitarco.com



We're pleased to see the much-maligned master volume control has been making a comeback at the boutique amp level. For many players, master volumes are associated with ultra-high gain, multiple channels and bewilderingly complex equalisation, but it needn't be that way. When coupled with simpler circuits, a master volume can provide a practical solution when the player's volume levels are restricted, which, for most of us these days, is all of the time.

The Laurel Canyon's master volume is among the best-sounding we've heard and there's so little tonal compromise that it's more akin to an especially transparent attenuator. As the output level is reduced, there's no shift from chewy power-valve overdrive into fizzy preamp gain. Instead, the overdrive character and overall tonal balance remain pretty much intact.

It would be easy to overlook the Laurel Canyon's onboard reverb but not because there's anything wrong with it. Quite the opposite, in fact. Rather, the lush and three-dimensional framing it provides for the dry tone is so impressively integrated that it's easy to forget it's there. The reverb never swamps the clarity of the guitar sound and coexists seamlessly.

The same can be said for the Laurel Canyon overall, because it imparts its sonic character without masking the tone of your guitars. Even with the overdrive roaring, it's always clear if you're playing a Tele, Gretsch, Strat or Les Paul and, by and large, they can be interchanged without any pressing need to change the control settings, which is often the sign of a superb amp and is especially handy for those who switch guitars frequently during live shows or recording sessions.

A Matchless with reverb and 6V6s is big news but be careful making assumptions on that basis. The Laurel Canyon can certainly generate convincing Fender-style tones but there's a Vox-like smoothness, chime and harmonic richness here that helps give the Laurel Canyon its own identity. You won't need a compressor to tame spiky transients and achieve adequate sustain, or a mid-heavy overdrive pedal for sufficient gain and guts.

The Laurel Canyon doesn't have the wild rawness of a tweed Fender or the caustic crunch of an early Marshall. Instead it's more like an expertly hot-rodded 1960s Fender, offering extended gain range, chime, refinement and touch sensitivity. Sure, it's not cheap, but this is contemporary valve-amplifier building at its best.

9/10 **Simple, tonally versatile, sparkling cleans and smooth overdrive – the Laurel Canyon is a real contender**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Carr Sportsman 112 **£2,099**
Morgan JS-12 **£2,199**
Tone King Imperial Mk II **£2,499**

ECHOLINE
SILICON HI-GAIN FUZZ

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

This independent UK maker has revamped its pedals to make them more board-friendly but a small footprint doesn't have to mean small fuzz tones

Having cornered the classily understated end of the British boutique pedal market, Echoline specialises in vintage-flavoured overdrive and distortion – and not, despite the name, echo. Luckily, there's no such room for confusion with the company's product names: on test today is a silicon high-gain fuzz appropriately called the Silicon Hi-Gain Fuzz.

The Echoline range was recently redesigned for modern players. In other words, the pedals were reduced in size so that they'll fit more easily on contemporary pedalboards – and we have no complaints about the look of this compact stomper. An all-black metal enclosure with only three controls spells stylish simplicity, and the fact that those knobs are fire-engine red is just a bonus.

What we're promised by this stompbox is lashings of harmonically rich fuzz tones, courtesy of its four silicon diodes. This is a straightforward device – you really can't go far wrong with a three-knob filth generator – but keep in mind what the manual says about the tone control. It's been "tailored to passively attenuate high frequencies without sacrificing midrange and clarity," which, at least in theory, is very sound thinking as far as we're concerned.

This is a tidy little chunk of gear. There's certainly nothing wrong with the overall build or the choice of hardware components, and there are no obvious clues as to how Echoline has managed to bring it in at a retail price that's not very 'boutique' at all.

Gain the upper hand: this crimson knob can take you from old-school to roaring fuzz

Echo flex: Echoline's pedals are hand-made in its Surrey HQ

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £129
DESCRIPTION Fuzz pedal, made in UK
CONTROLS Volume, tone, gain
FEATURES Buffered bypass, powered by 9V mains supply only (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS 121 x 72 x 56mm
CONTACT echolinepedals.com

IN USE

Bracing ourselves for something quite ferocious, we begin our testing with a Tele, a clean-ish Vox-type amp and the pedal's controls all trained skywards. It's high-gain alright, with a full-range frequency response and the kind of harmonic richness that makes powerchords sound suitably epic in an instant.

In a side-by-side comparison with a silicon Fuzz Face type, the distortion itself is much more smooth and furry, swapping that vintage gurgle for something with a lot more air. But the midrange is strong – you won't find any Muff-style scooping here – and there's a biting edge to the tone that makes this feel like a thoroughly modern stompbox.

That bite can be accentuated by cranking the tone control and softened by turning it down; as promised, there's no loss of clarity and midrange snarl. In fact, whip back and forth between those two ends of the dial and it sounds like two different fuzzes – more than you get from most pedals of this type.

The gain knob's no slouch either: max it out for thunderous chaos or whack it down to zero for a more old-school sound that's still fuzzy but with less presence and more dynamic range. The breadth of tones here is quite something.

The one area where the Echoline fails to match a Fuzz Face, however, is in how it responds to pulling back on the guitar's volume knob – things get woofy and weak rather than crunchy and crisp – but this probably isn't the sort of pedal you'll use at anything less than full blast anyway. GC

9/10 **A thoughtfully designed and surprisingly versatile fuzz monster**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

ThorpyFX Fallout Cloud **£185**
KMA Machines Fuzzly Bear **€179**
Electro-Harmonix Green Russian Muff **£75**

DRYBELL
THE ENGINE

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

This 'foundation preamp' packs both a Plexi-style overdrive and a versatile boost circuit for a full suite of 1960s British rock and blues tones

There's nothing quite like the visceral roar of an old Plexi head cranked up to 11. But they're devastatingly loud and hefty beasts, especially once you've slapped that obligatory 4x12 cabinet underneath. The current trend for Marshall-in-a-box pedals, then, makes a great deal of sense. And this one, from Croatian maker DryBell, is quite possibly the classiest example yet.

The Engine aims to capture the crunch of a vintage Marshall amp and the spank of a Rangemaster treble booster, with enough controls between its two independent (and stackable) channels to cover any old-school British tone you might care to hear.

Immaculately finished in Prussian blue, this dual stomper is easy to navigate once you see it as two distinct pedals sharing an enclosure. On the left, our overdrive has controls for level and gain, plus mini knobs for tone and midrange shape; on the right, the booster allows adjustments to those all-important upper-mid frequencies (range), as well as the overall boost level, with active bass and treble controls below.

The two footswitches are as far apart as they could reasonably be, while a push-button in the middle lets you flip the order when you have both engaged – something you certainly can't do with an original Dallas Rangemaster and Marshall Super Lead.

IN USE

A preamp is as much about tone-shaping as it is about dirt and, for what it's worth, the Plexi side of this unit can go almost completely clean. But we're here for the crunchy stuff.

Close range: the range knob controls the upper-mids for Rangemaster-style tones

KEY FEATURES

PRICE €326
DESCRIPTION Overdrive/preamp and boost pedal, made in Croatia
CONTROLS Side A (overdrive) level, gain, tone, shape, bypass footswitch; Side B (boost) range, level, low, high, bypass footswitch; A-B/B-A order switch
FEATURES Buffered bypass, powered by 9V mains supply only (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS 120 x 98 x 51mm
CONTACT drybell.com

Built to order: this push-button lets you flip the order of the overdrive and boost

Thankfully, it's extremely good. It hardly seems to matter what kind of amp you run it through, The Engine's drive circuit pushes out classic Marshall grind, with that familiar tight bass and sweetly rasping edge. The mid-gain sounds are on the money and, yes, it will stretch to JCM800-style heavier tones with no less authority.

In an A/B test with the ThorpyFX Bunker, another fine Plexi type, the DryBell's overdrive sounds smoother, more compressed and less forthright in the midrange, which will make it easier to love for some but less alive and 'authentic' for others. Anyway, it's at its most pure with the shape control maxed out – turn this anti-clockwise and the mids soften down even further.

Rangemasters are really more about pushing the biting upper mids and tightening the low end than adding pure treble, and this device's second channel can certainly do that: with the range control at full and some cut to the low EQ, you get a clonking slap around the chops that's pure first-generation Brit rock. Play around with all three tone controls, however, and a wide palette of boost textures reveals itself, from a simple full-frequency shunt to various shades of Vox-like chime.

This makes for a natural pairing with the Plexi channel and the fact that you can switch the order of the two is a particularly useful touch: boost into drive offers more saturation, while putting the drive first lets the tonally-focused boost cut through more clearly. This is a mightily pricey pedal, yes. But consider this a two-for-one deal, made all the better by the fact that both options are absolutely superb.

9/10 **An array of top-class Plexi overdrive and boost tones in one luxury package**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

ThorpyFX The Bunker **£189**
Wampler Plexi-Drive Deluxe **£229**
Carl Martin PlexiTone **£199**

WARM AUDIO
FOXY TONE BOX

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

From a US brand best known for its recording equipment comes an authentically hirsute take on one of the wildest fuzz boxes of the 1970s

Guitar gear sales have been booming since the lockdown, so maybe this isn't such a crazy time for Warm Audio, a Texas-based firm that specialises in retro-flavoured microphones and studio outboard, to expand into the realm of stompboxes.

Sticking with its road-tested vintage vibe, the company's first pedals are a reborn Roland Jet Phaser and this, a tribute to one of the world's feistiest octave fuzz boxes: the Foxx Tone Machine. Yes, there are some modern imitations of that 1970s classic on the market already but how many of them are covered in period-correct fluffy felt?

In cosmetic terms at least, Warm Audio hasn't taken any half measures here. It's not an exact replica like the 'official' reissue from a few years back – we're pretty sure the Foxx was never available in this lovely tangerine colour – but, for better or worse, the overall form of the pedal is faithful to its inspiration: unfashionably wide, with the knobs along the front edge and the sockets the wrong way round on the back.

There are some concessions to modernity, however. The controls are more spaced out than on the original, and while it does still have a battery compartment, there's also a 9V adapter input. You even get a tiny LED but that's just to indicate power, not bypass status.

The build quality feels impeccable and Warm Audio has sourced some of the same Fairchild 2n3565 germanium transistors that powered the original Foxx, so we're expecting a blast of uncompromising fuzz.

IN USE

Even with the sustain knob set just shy of 10 o'clock, it's clear there's nothing subtle about this pedal. It's about as thick and syrupy as fuzz gets, with a real analogue synth-like texture to single notes that translates into a nuclear blast of sound when you start grandstanding with powerchords.

In tone terms, it's actually fairly uncoloured: the mids don't get unduly aggressive unless you really push the tone control, and the balance between whumping bass and fizzing treble is more than manageable. As for the gain range, there's enough of it to make the sustain control worthwhile but not enough that it ever sounds anything less than rampant.

It's only with the octave engaged that the Foxx's notorious sonic savagery shows up. The upper octave itself is clearer than most, as long as you're playing high up the neck and ideally on the neck pickup. But it's just as much fun to use this as a textural feature – turning every low note into a vicious snarl and every chord into a snowstorm of discordant harmonic overload.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE €179
DESCRIPTION Octave fuzz pedal, assembled in China
CONTROLS Volume, sustain, octave on/off switch, tone
FEATURES True bypass, powered by 9V battery (included) or mains supply
DIMENSIONS 165 x 122 x 63mm
CONTACT warmaudio.com

The mild gating effect, meanwhile, only adds to the drama. This fox clearly has sharp teeth.

A footswitch for the octave would have been nice but then, there are lots of things Warm Audio could have done to make the Foxy Tone Box a better fit for modern pedalboards. The thing is though, that's not really the point. If you love the look as well as the sound of the Foxx – and fancy one that's actually the colour of a fox – then this is probably your new best option.

8/10 **A joyously impractical, deliciously sweet and sticky octave fuzz**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Danelectro 3699 Fuzz **£174**
Teisco Fuzz **£114**
Orange Fur Coat **£109**

What does the fox say? Warm Audio has given this box a distinctive and combative voice

Stone-cold fox: orange you glad about this period-accurate felt?

THROBAK ELECTRONICS
KOSS-301 MXV

WORDS HUW PRICE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

These PAF replicas are based on the pickups in Paul Kossoff's Les Paul – sadly his sublime vibrato is not included

KEY FEATURES

PRICE $607 (as reviewed)
DESCRIPTION Humbucking pickup set, made in the US
FEATURES Butyrate bobbins, aged covers with vintage-correct corners and screw-hole dimples, 42 AWG plain enamel magnet wire with 42 AWG heavy formvar for bridge screw coil (reverse hand-wound), long alnico II magnets, vintage-correct braided wire
CONTACT throbak.com

Paul Kossoff's famous broken-neck 1959 Les Paul was in the custody of his friend Arthur Ramm for several decades before being purchased in 2016 by Mississippi native and guitar collector Kris Blakely. Blakely subsequently approached John Gundry from ThroBak Electronics, who was granted access to the PAFs in Kossoff's Burst in order to analyse them and create this replica set.

When Kossoff broke the instrument's neck in the early 1970s, it found its way to legendary luthier Sam Li for repair. In addition to the neck repair, the bridge pickup was in need of attention. The PAF's original coils were machine-wound with plain enamel magnet wire but Li rewound one coil with heavy formvar wire using a machine made from an old record player.

Li actually reverse-wound the coil, which necessitated reversing the coil's start and finish wires and flipping the magnet during reassembly. If this sounds familiar, you won't be surprised to learn that Li was the man behind the pickup repair that gave Peter Green's Burst its distinctive sound, although Kossoff's pickup remained in phase.

The '301' in the name of this repro set refers to the Meteor-301 winding machine, one of four machines Gibson used back in the 1950s. ThroBak uses refurbished vintage winding machines exclusively, and familiarity with these winding patterns enabled the Grand Rapids brand not only to identify the machine that wound the three surviving coils on the Kossoff Burst but also to use the same type of machine for these authentic replicas.

Most original PAFs have brass bobbin screws but the pickups in Kossoff's guitar sport steel screws. ThroBak also analysed the magnets, and gauss readings matched alnico II and alnico IV. After listening tests, ThroBak opted to use long alnico II magnets for the replicas, along with 1010 steel bobbin screws.

All the features here live up to ThroBak's exacting vintage standards. Our review set has aged nickel covers but pristine covers are also available, along with a 'pre-repair' Kossoff set based on a best-guess analysis regarding the original bridge coil prior to Sam Li's rewind.

IN USE

We can't fly to Mississippi to compare these pickups to the originals but we do have a rather nice PAF-loaded 1953 Les Paul conversion on hand for comparison. It's immediately apparent that the ThroBaks sound an awful lot like vintage PAFs – but there's a twist.

Like our vintage PAFs, the ThroBaks provide extreme clarity, touch sensitivity and amazing sustain. The vintage units are slightly scooped in the mids, which emphasises ethereal harmonic overtones and breathy detail. However, this could be attributable simply to magnet differences.

The ThroBaks' more forward midrange is combined with slightly more aggression in the upper-mids but all the clarity and precision is there to cut straight through a mix. Single notes also have more girth, especially on the bridge.

We're impressed with the bite but they're less quacky and clicky than the vintage PAFs. It's quintessential Les Paul rather than a Tele-on-steroids sound, and both sets have that pronounced transition from crisp articulation on the plain strings to a slight softness on the wound strings.

The differences are more pronounced with clean tones than crunch but the vintage PAFs always have a touch more chime. That said, the ThroBaks offer authentic vintage PAF tones with an extra helping of attitude – the only inevitable disappointment is that they won't make your playing sound quite as good as Paul Kossoff's.

9/10 **Superior and highly specialised PAF replicas that effortlessly evoke bluesier, rockier and louder times**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Monty's PAFs **£245**
OX4 Humbuckers **£245**
Sunbear 59 A5 SBPAFs (aged) **£259**

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AUDIENT
EVO 4

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

This little box from studio brand Audient promises to bridge the gap between guitar and computer in the most user-friendly way yet

There was a time when home recording meant sitting in front of your ghetto blaster, pushing down the first two buttons and strumming away to tape. Times have changed and you are yet to change with them – or if you're a young gun looking to make your first decent-quality demos – Audient's new Evo 4 audio interface might just be the gadget you need.

There's no shortage of affordable USB interfaces out there, many of them designed to remove the confusion from recording real instruments using PC and Mac software. But this is the only one we know of in this price range that'll set the recording level *for* you.

Barely bigger than a smartphone, this black plastic box keeps the controls as minimal as possible, with just a single multi-purpose knob and a few buttons.

There are two XLR/jack microphone inputs on the back, plus a 1/4-inch jack socket on the front for guitars and other instruments. Phantom power is available for mics that require it, and you can record on both channels simultaneously, which could be handy for podcasters, as well as singer-songwriters and banjo duellists.

Surrounded by marker LEDs, that central knob can be assigned to control the input gain on either channel, the output volume, or the monitor balance between signal-in and computer-out. You might not, however, need the first of those functions: push the green button and you'll activate Smartgain mode, which allows the Evo 4 to set the input level automatically by listening to you play (or sing) for a few seconds.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £99
DESCRIPTION USB audio interface, made in China
CONTROLS Master dial for output volume, input gain and input/monitor balance; channel 1 and 2 selector buttons, 48V phantom power button, Smartgain mode button
FEATURES Two mic/line inputs, one instrument input, stereo monitor outputs, headphone output; powered by USB (cable included); driver and control software for macOS/Windows to download
DIMENSIONS 140 x 67 x 67mm
CONTACT evo.audio

Inevitably, you'll have to download a driver first. But this only takes a few minutes and comes with a piece of control software that effectively replicates the full functionality of the unit on your screen.

IN USE

There's no denying that the Evo 4's user experience is about as foolproof as it gets. Once the USB cable is plugged in and the driver installed, it's just a matter of selecting the interface in the preferences of your usual recording software. Don't despair if you don't have powered monitors – just plug your guitar into the left-hand socket and your headphones into the right and you're in business.

Turning a large knob to adjust input gain isn't exactly the toughest job in recording but the Smartgain feature is simple to use and offers reassurance that you're never going to stray into the red zone. During our testing, it tended to set levels on the low side but a conservative approach is understandable here: it's easy to boost a quiet recording but not as easy to rescue a distorted one.

That instrument input feeds a JFET preamp and the resulting sound quality is truly excellent. In fact, it's practically indistinguishable from our usual Focusrite Clarett interface and with no added noise. The mic inputs are equally impressive, and with the Evo 4 capable of recording 24-bit/96kHz audio, this is unlikely to be the weakest link in your signal chain. This is the audio interface evolved.

8/10 **A tidy recording interface for technophobic guitar players**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Focusrite Scarlett 2i2 **£150**
M-Audio Air 192/4 **£105**
PreSonus AudioBox USB 96 **£99**

THE RUNDOWN

THIS MONTH'S BEST NEW GEAR

WORDS CILLIAN BREATHNACH

From tricked-out signature models to limited-edition baritones and reptilian effects pedals, here's the most exciting new guitars, amps and pedals to be launched this month

FENDER SHAWN MENDES FOUNDATION MUSICMASTER

1 Created in partnership with the pop-guitar superstar's charitable foundation, this signature model is based on Fender's Player Duo-Sonic but boasts a striking floral pattern that was designed by a Mendes fan. "I hope it inspires my fans to pick up and learn guitar for the first time," said the 22-year-old Canadian, "and give back while doing so."

fender.com

GIBSON LUKAS NELSON '56 LP JUNIOR

2 Gibson's latest signature model is heavily inspired by the Neil Young and Promise of the Real guitarist's own 1956 Junior but with modern accommodations such as a compensated wrapover bridge and custom-wound pickup. "This guitar has taken me to some amazing places," said Nelson, "and I hope other people get the same opportunity."

gibson.com

CORT KX500

3 As the new flagship model of Cort's KX Series, the Cort KX500 electric guitar was designed with players of heavy genres in mind. It has a mahogany body and a 3D multi-layered ash burl top finished, of course, in black. As for its electronics, the KX500 comes outfitted with a pair of active Fishman Fluence Modern humbuckers

cortguitars.com

WALRUS AUDIO JULIANNA

5 The big sister to Walrus's massively popular Julia chorus/vibrato, the Julianna sports all the features of its sibling but with a raft of new ones, such as tap tempo, expression control and stereo in/out jacks. There's also a wealth of new options to manipulate the LFO, including a drift function and the ability to ramp things up or slow them down.

walrusaudio.com

FENDER TREAD-LIGHT WAH

6 Fender's increasingly comprehensive range of pedals has expanded once again, and now includes expression and wah options. With a handsome routed wooden top and rugged steel bottom, the Tread-Light looks the part for sure and, with three toggle switches to alter the mid frequencies, it promises to be versatile unit too. Make room on your board.

fender.com

CATALINBREAD GALLERY SERIES NAGA VIPER

7 Now under new ownership, the boutique US effects brand kicked off its new Gallery Series with the limited-edition Naga Viper treble booster, which boasts gnarly custom art courtesy of artist Colin Shawcross. Catalinbread is donating 10 per cent of the proceeds from the sale of this pedal to Shriners Hospitals for Children in Florida.

catalinbread.com

ERNIE BALL MUSIC MAN AXIS SUPER SPORT BARITONE

4 The baritone variant of Ernie Ball Music Man's Axis Super Sport, this sparkly instrument features a basswood body, a roasted maple neck and an ebony fingerboard. The guitar comes with a pair of custom-designed baritone humbuckers that are routed to a straightforward control section with a master volume knob and tone pot, as well as a five-way pickup selector.
music-man.com

FENDER ACOUSTIC JUNIOR GO

8 Fender has overhauled its acoustic amp range with a trio of new boxes aimed at performing artists. This may be the best of the bunch. With 100 watts, two channels, an eight-inch speaker with hi-fi compression tweeter, eight built-in effects and a looper, the Acoustic Junior Go is well equipped. It also boasts a rechargeable battery for 12 hours of play time.
fender.com

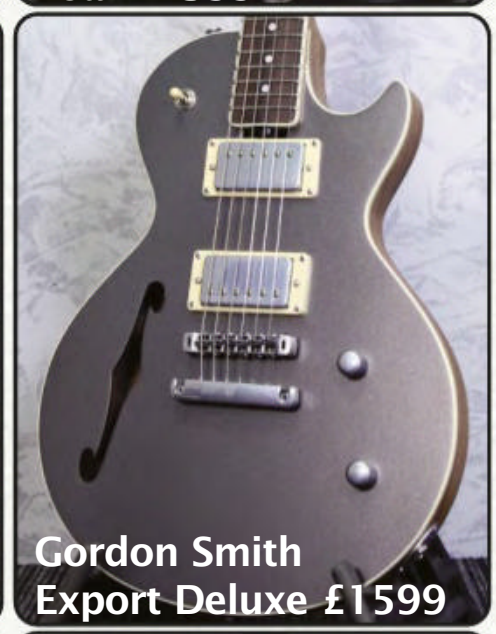
Forsyth
Est 1857

Highlights Of The Month

Atkin L- 36 Custom
Birdseye Maple £3675

Martin 000- 12E
Koa £1399

Auden Colton Artist
Mahogany £1349


Gordon Smith
Export Deluxe £1599

Ortega 8 String
RCE159- 8 £550

Guild Starfire 1
SC £499

ACOUSTICS
Main dealer for Lowden, Atkin, Brook, Sheeran, Patrick James Eggle, Martin, Faith, Auden, Seagull, Fender, Eastman, Aria, Crafter, Maton, Furch, Tanglewood

CLASSICALS
Main dealer for Buguet, Ramirez, Raimundo, Ortega, Admira, Cordoba and Strunal

ELECTRICS AND BASSES
Main dealer for Rickenbacker, Gordon Smith, Eastman, Fender, Gretsch, Danelectro, Maton, Squier, Revelation, Aria, Hofner, Godin, Cort

Repair department specialising in acoustic and electric guitars

Spread across five stories in the heart of Manchester, Forsyth specialise in a full range of musical instruments, sheet music, a recorded music department specialising in classical and jazz and instrument repair

www.forsyths.co.uk/guitars
Forsyth Brothers Ltd, 126 Deansgate, Manchester M3 2GR
@ForsythMusic Forsyths.Music.Shop

Ciaran playing a Sitka spruce and sapele OM

This cedar-topped Parlour model has cocobolo back and sides

INDUSTRY INSIDER

MCNALLY GUITARS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Ciaran McNally prides himself on the versatility of his instruments, alongside exquisite craftsmanship and a blend of traditional and modern luthiery. We catch up with him to discover how he got into the industry

How did you get into guitar?

"I started playing guitar when I was about 14 or 15 years old. Lots of my friends played guitar and they played very well. So, when I decided I wanted to try it too, I took lessons for about nine months before telling any of them!"

When did you start building or tinkering with guitars?

"I was more of an electric player back then. From there came the idea of modifying and upgrading my own guitars, which were pretty cheap. After that came Partscasters. I took an evening course in guitar making when I was 17 and was given a gentle nudge to make an acoustic guitar instead; I've never made an electric since. The first acoustic was a copy of a Martin 000, as I was liking Eric Clapton's signature at the time. That one travelled with me back and forth from Belfast to London a lot, when I was studying guitar making at London Met. It got pretty beat up by university life and, as my skills developed, I started to notice how roughly made it was. Finally, after it got seriously damaged on a flight, I decided it would take more effort to fix it than it would to make a new one. I found it very therapeutic: cutting the headstock off, splitting the body in two with a bandsaw and chucking it in a skip! It was a moment of deciding to make better guitars."

When did you realise that you had a viable business?

"Probably in the middle of 2019, which is about 14 years after I first started tinkering. I was finding more of the right customers, and dealers were taking notice of what I was doing. That also lined up with me settling on the more defined style of guitar that I'm making now. You've kind of got to bang on the door for about 10 years before anybody notices. Having worked for two prominent guitar companies, I already had an inside view into the industry and was acutely aware of how difficult it can be to make this a viable business.

"While other people may throw themselves into a business somewhat naively, not knowing its realities, I was the opposite. I knew the time had to be right, the guitars had to be right, and I would have to be fully confident in my skills not just as a guitar maker but as a business manager and a salesman. I also realised I couldn't sell

McNally in the workshop with a Sitka-and-walnut OM

guitars that I didn't believe in personally, which very much led me to stop following and copying trends in guitar making and have confidence in my own judgement of what makes a McNally guitar. I also realised that value for money is a really important factor. While my guitars are still premium-price items, they are at the affordable end of the luthier market. I really enjoy being in this space, partly because I'm making guitars that I can very much stand behind and would buy myself but also because I believe there's a lot more interaction with musicians that can happen."

Did you have any external investment starting out?

"I recently had some family investment to get the workshop up and running. I had an offer of help from others in the past, which I was reluctant to take. I was always very clear that I didn't want to venture out on my own in a half-cooked fashion. I wanted to do it properly with the right space, equipment and background budgets to exist as a real business. I felt that if I did it too early without making real business considerations, I'd be setting myself up to fall out of love with guitar making. It's too precious an activity for me think about that. Before this latest workshop, and while I worked for other guitar companies, I made my own guitars outside of working hours. Looking back now, I'm realising that I've probably worked an average of 60 to 70 hours a week for five or six years! I always reinvested the money from those guitars into the next two or three guitars, new equipment and further training courses."

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?

"I'm not sure it's even there yet but I've realised this is a moving target that I'll probably never be happy with. I think the brand is more consistent now with the ethos of the guitars, that being a cross between the Celtic and traditional US styles of guitar making. It's not a groundbreaking reinvention of the wheel but if you look a little closer you'll realise it's actually quite unique. There are no smoke and mirrors or magical methods being used, and I'm not romantically attached to any particular method. I use a mixture of traditional and modern techniques. I simply choose the method that gives me the best results. My focus is not to be a 'traditional' or 'modern' guitar maker, only to make the best guitars I'm capable of."

How did you come up with your best-selling product?

"I don't have a best-selling product but my OM model is the one I've made the most versions of. It's a prime example of the cross between Celtic and US styles, and this body shape makes for a very versatile acoustic sound. Like value for money, I believe that versatility in acoustic guitars is an overlooked but important quality. I see acoustic luthiers claiming to have more and more tone and sustain but I struggle to see it being utilised by musicians. Versatility is a really important factor in the inspiration an instrument can give. I started to notice that it was the versatile instruments that people fall in love with and don't part with. I think the customers that gravitate towards my guitars appreciate this approach."

What's your proudest moment as a maker?

"I'm very proud to have some of the best guitar stores in the world selling my instruments alongside some of the best guitar makers on the planet. However, nothing beats a player telling you that your guitar is their go-to instrument. I also had a character named after me in *The Fall* TV show – all the characters are named after guitar brands. That was pretty cool. I've also had a few of my guitars bequeathed as treasured possessions to new owners in wills, which is very humbling."

What's next for McNally Guitars?

"I'm currently working on the first McNally signature model, with an incredible guitarist. This one has a few new features for me and has been developed in partnership with an electronics genius. It's set to be revealed in about September or October. I'm working on a new dreadnought model too. I love traditional dreadnoughts, and this will be focused towards a more traditional sound. I believe a good dreadnought is hard to beat when it comes to folk music, and in particular Irish trad. I'll also be making my first multi-scale fan fret in early 2021."

Find out more about McNally Guitars at mcnallyguitars.com

CARMINE STREET
GUITARS
ELECT TRICK
NEW YORK CITY
Made in Nature

SHOP TALK

RICK KELLY
CARMINE STREET GUITARS

WORDS DAVE HUNTER
PHOTOGRAPHY CINDY HULEJ

Rick Kelly's guitars aren't just made in New York – they're built using the very fabric of the city

Guitar fanatics go wild for well-aged timber with a backstory. Contemplate, then, the sound of a guitar made from wood salvaged from the fire-damaged steeple of a church built in 1790 – wood that had the bells' vibrations ringing through it for more than 200 years.

A native New Yorker, Rick Kelly of Carmine Street Guitars has been building instruments since the 1970s and, for the past few decades, has laid claim to being arguably the *most* New York of the many luthiers based here in the Big Apple. Given the stuff that goes into them, you might say Kelly's guitars are literally *made* from New York. But what might seem a gimmick in other hands – if an extremely compelling one – came entirely naturally to Kelly, and of necessity, as he eked out the starving artist's subsistence in the early days of his career.

"I was born in Jamaica Hospital in Queens in 1950," says Kelly. "I had made my first instrument in high school. It was a little ukulele, Then when I went to the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore in 1968, I was running out of money, so I started making Appalachian dulcimers to sell at craft shows in upstate New York. I made a living doing that for about 10 years, until the late 1970s, when I started making more solidbody electric guitars.

"That's where I learnt that old instruments sound better than new ossnes, and about the kind of wood Stradivarius used in his violins. And then I lived on a farm out in rural Maryland and cut firewood. I had wood heat in the house for 10 years, so I learnt a lot about wood from chopping it four hours a day to keep my shop and the house warm. It's a real backbone to where I am today."

THE BONES OF OLD NEW YORK

Although Kelly has built all kinds of guitars in his more than four decades at the workbench, he is best known for his Tele-style instruments, some of which are slightly modified, while others remain close to the original template. As for the wood, though, Kelly's guitars adhere more closely to the very first pre-production Fenders.

"Look at Leo Fender's first prototypes," says Kelly. "They were made out of pine, what I'm doing now. But it was just lumberyard pine, he wasn't using old-growth, so it was probably a good idea to get rid of it."

The stuff Kelly's using, on the other hand, is old growth in the extreme. Wood used in his Bowery Pine Series – named for the section of southern Manhattan from where much of it has been salvaged – has been reclaimed from the demolition and refurbishment sites of some of New York's oldest buildings. Kelly calls it "the bones of old New York" and, in many cases, it's timber that was known in a previous age as "the King's pine".

In the 1750s, some two decades before the US declared independence, the entire region of the Northeastern Colonies was considered crown land, and King George I claimed exclusive rights to all of the pines in New England and upstate New York. His emissaries marked the best and tallest of these Eastern white pines with an emblem called the King's Broad Arrow, declaring them property of the King of England, for the exclusive use of the Royal British Navy. While the vast majority of such trees are long gone, hikers in more remote stretches of these forests still occasionally come across one of the King's pines, with its faded Broad Arrow.

Later, pines that escaped the axe prior to the founding of the United States were often barged down the Hudson River from the massive virgin forests of the Adirondacks in upstate New York. Although their use in buildings in Manhattan and Brooklyn in the late 1700s and early 1800s would seem to date them fairly precisely, consider that these tall pines might already have been hundreds of years old even before the date of their harvesting.

While it might seem the perfect angle for a guitar maker in this tonewood-conscious age, this knack for salvaging special wood came to Kelly early on – and was hugely important to him.

"I majored in sculpture at college," he says, "and, struggling through that, I had to source wood that was already reclaimed to make my sculptures, because I was making things out of wood even then. That's what led me to the instrument world at about the same time, and what led to me knowing why old instruments sound better: because the wood has gone through this mystery of the molecules, as I like to call it. The resin in the wood crystallises and opens up the pores for vibrations, and then the vibrations that travel through the wood change it. The wood seasons and becomes resonant with age. I knew right then that there was a lot to that.

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ABOVE Kelly planing a chunk of 'the bones of old New York'

FACING PAGE LEFT An Esquire-style Kelly guitar in all its knotted glory

FACING PAGE RIGHT A single-pickup Kelly creation with slot headstock standing proudly in Greenwich Village

"That building got renovated and I got three truckloads of wood out of there in the pouring rain; I had to buy all the workers lunch. It was from 1822, even older than the building I'm in now. These old buildings and the timbers inside them… what they've seen. They were trees back when George Washington was president."

In addition to insisting that you can hear all that experience in the wood – the bell tower beams, for example, having had a 200-year head start on those pores reforming sympathetically to the musical vibrations that so many guitarists and luthiers likewise swear by – Kelly derives immense pleasure simply from working with the material.

"It's amazing working with this stuff, sitting and playing with it all day," he says. "The Chumley's wood was an old bar for so long, so it was beer-soaked. When you walk by a bar in the morning, the smell that comes wafting out of the window from the night before? That's what this wood smelled like when you cut into it. It had picked up those odours, because it's a porous material. It stays in there."

UP THE NECK

Another aspect of the craft that Kelly has learnt from older instruments, and which he has found to have been proven elsewhere, is the use of a big neck. When the customer will allow it, Kelly favours a chunky neck profile with substantial depth, and he's convinced that this benefits both instrument and player in multiple ways.

"Not only does it sound better, because there's more wood in the instrument and so it has more tone that way," he says, "but it actually relaxes your hand more too. We have a few hand surgeons here in the city who are also guitar players, and that was their prescription for patients that would come in with hand injuries from playing guitar – there are a lot of carpel-tunnel and elbow-stress injuries, and they said, 'Try a bigger neck'. I can't tell you how many times people have been able to play again because they've got a bigger neck."

While this particular prescription might seem counter-intuitive – our instinctive feeling often being, 'My hand hurts, so reaching around a fatter neck will only hurt it more' – Kelly and others have discovered that the added wood and a full deep profile tend to support the hand and ease playing, rather than inducing more strain:

"It fills your whole hand," says Kelly. "You're not pinching and squeezing to make chords. And that's where you build up the stress in your hand, the thin little bones and muscles that run through your hand and up into your forearm."

As for the sonic component, Kelly also believes that the size of the neck and the wood used in it are responsible for a larger proportion of any guitar's tone than is generally credited by most players.

"I think it's probably closer to 60/40 in favour of the neck," he says. "People would never give the neck that much credit but I know that in my instruments, when I don't use a truss rod and I make them out of pine, I feel I get that kind of result.

"People gasp when they hear that there's no truss rod in a pine neck [a feature in some but not all of Kelly's guitars] but when you use a certain kind of wood and a certain part of the wood that's as old as this is – and it grew much slower back in the 1700s when these trees were alive, and then they lived to full maturity – you can make a complete neck out of that without a truss rod, and it doesn't move. They're going on 20 years and they still haven't moved at all. It's just a wonderful thing."

CARMINE STREET CALLING

Parallel to the wood he works with, Kelly has also found his New York location conducive to the craft and contemplation of musical instrument making, as much for the artists who have wandered into his shop over the years – and often wandered out as friends – as for the history of the address itself.

Kelly moved into his premises on this short street in west Greenwich Village in 1990 and has worked there ever since, accompanied in recent years by his apprentice and assistant Cindy Hulej, now a skilled and respected guitar-maker in her own right, who continues to share the shop space.

"It's so weird," says Kelly. "I was looking for a store and I found this place. It kind of drew me to it. And I didn't even know this until I moved onto this block but I later found out that – on this little street called Carmine Street – Jose Rubio, Tom Hoff, Tom Humphrey, Lucien Barnes and Michael Gurian all built guitars on this block, and it only runs three blocks long.

"Now my shop's on this block and it was totally coincidental. Martin Guitars was right around the corner too. They had their first shop there in the 1800s right on Hudson Street, before they moved out to Nazareth, Pennsylvania. It was considered that they shouldn't be allowed to be in the Woodworker's Union, so they just said, 'Alright, we'll go out where the other Germans are'."

Right from the beginning, it seems that this little Carmine Street joint was a haunt for notable New York guitarists, as well as those from further afield.

"I MET KEITH RICHARDS ONCE WHEN HE WAS IN THE SHOP. HE SAID HE WAS IN GUITAR HEAVEN"

Many became devoted clients and several are legends who are no longer with us.

"I thought it was special knowing Chris Whitley when he was alive here," says Kelly, "and Robert Quine was a good friend of mine. He played with the Voidoids, and with Lou Reed for many years. He was one of my best friends. He'd come to the shop every single day when he was in town. What an incredible guitar player.

"And Lou Reed himself. He was a great guitarist at the end there, and he was using them Battery Pines too. Allen Woody, when he came to town with the Allman Brothers Band or Gov't Mule, I'd go over to see them at the Wetlands or CBGB, and he'd bring me on the tour bus, and everyone was smoking pot. I miss a lot of those guys.

"I met Keith Richards once when he was in the shop. He said he was in 'guitar heaven'. One time, Lou was here with Dave Stewart from the Eurythmics. I didn't have a camera – so a lot of it's up in the head, the memories. Bob Quine, Patti Smith, and Lou Reed all hanging in the back here and talking, and I didn't have a recorder going. The stories went on for two hours. It was just amazing." G

Carmine Street Guitars was the subject of a recent documentary film. Visit carminestreetguitarsfilm.com to find out more

DIY WORKSHOP

RESTORING CHRIS BUCK'S HOUSE-CLEARANCE STRATOCASTER

WORDS HUW PRICE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE & HUW PRICE

Finding a bargain-priced 1962 Stratocaster at a local auction might sound like a fairytale, but this guitar needed a lot of work

Shortly before Christmas 2019, Buck & Evans guitarist and YouTube sensation Chris Buck sent me a grainy image of an old Stratocaster that was due to be sold at auction the next morning. Unlike musical instrument specialists such as Gardiner Houlgate, house clearances and liquidations tend to be Pontypridd Auctions' stock in trade, so the details provided were sketchy to say the least.

"Somebody tagged me in a very pixelated video", recalls Chris. "I could see this abomination of a Strat leaning up against a cardboard box and they just scanned over it really quickly. I'm not a vintage gear aficionado but I could tell it looked old and clearly had a lot of wear. I was nervous because if I'd alerted anyone to this who I didn't have a particularly close relationship with, they might have beaten me to the punch."

I offered to go with Chris to check it out and, early the following morning, we found ourselves in the Pontypridd Auctions sale room gazing at a truly dilapidated red 1962 Stratocaster. Other items included a fawn AC30 combo that had been converted into a head, along with a pair of vintage Vox speaker cabinets, a Roland Space Echo and a valve WEM Copicat. On balance, everything pointed towards the sad demise of a Shadows fan.

"I thought there was an outside chance that I was one of only a few people who had figured out what this instrument might be," says Chris. "But, at nine o'clock, the floodgates opened and there was quite a bit of interest in the guitar. We were ushered into a back room, where the guitar was dismantled for closer inspection as we enjoyed some tea and biscuits."

On the plus side though, the neck finish and the headstock decal were untouched, and all the original tuners were present and correct. The other hardware was vintage too, although 1970s saddles had replaced all the Pat Pend originals. The three-way selector switch and two of the original pickups appeared to have survived but one of the pickups was a grey-bottomed 1970s unit, and a toggle switch had been installed in place of the second tone control.

Before the restoration, this Strat was missing a tone pot and had three added switches – more horrors lay under the 'guard

Although two original potentiometers and knobs remained, the wiring was a mess. Various capacitors were hanging off the selector switch and only three short lengths of the original cloth wire were still present. Most curiously, at some point a hole had been drilled through the body into the spring cavity to fit a potentiometer.

The original mint-green nitrate guard had been hacked out to accommodate three slider switches. Worse still, the body had been modified for the switches and extra wiring – seemingly with a blunt chisel and a lump hammer. The fretboard was in a similarly sorry state, with missing chunks of rosewood, deep divots and a partial fret job. It seemed as if this was going to be a very big project indeed.

Heading outside for a chat, Chris and I agreed that this guitar wasn't going to be appearing on his YouTube channel later that week after a simple clean-up, string change and truss-rod tweak. "We spoke about the work that would be required," says Chris, "and what the guitar's potential worth might be. I had a ballpark figure in my mind of what I was willing to go up to and my limit was £2,000."

CRUNCH TIME

With the Strat earmarked for lot 46, Chris faced an agonising wait. Lot 45 – two sets of plastic shower curtains – achieved an impressive £4.50 and then suddenly it was game on. Chris describes the exhilarating moment he realised he'd won.

"I'd never bid on anything outside of eBay in my life, so I was frantically sticking my paddle up in the air," he says. "Then suddenly it was over and the auctioneer pointed towards me and asked for a paddle number. I looked over my shoulder because I thought someone standing behind must have outbid me but it was mine for £1,950."

We had no idea whether the pickups were working and, since the guitar wasn't even close to being playable at this point, there was no accurate way to tell if the thing sounded any good. On the plus side, the chunky neck profile felt extremely nice and the overall weight was perfect for an early 1960s Strat. The omens were good. But what prompted Chris to take such a big chance anyway?

The switches on lot 46 are a fairly common mod but they would have to go

We think this large toggle triggered tone-mod circuitry controlled by the three-way switch

A mystery potentiometer was wedged into a hole drilled through the body

The neck had a badly damaged 'board and a thick coat of varnish

"The story appealed to the romantic in me," he says. "This auction house is close to my doorstep, the Strat is from the golden era, and I'm a Strat guy. Everything seemed to add up on some weird level. Not that I subscribe to that cosmic stuff but it did feel like it was meant to be.

"I trust Huw's opinion and he explained what was involved and how much the restoration was likely to cost. I also realised that if I didn't end up liking the guitar, I could sell it and get my money back. Even so, I walked out of the auction shaking.

"When I got it home, there was a temptation to string it up but, for once, I exercised some restraint. I didn't want my first playing experience of the guitar to be anything other than as good as it could be. All I did was plug into a practice amp and tap the pickups to test if they were working."

BATTLE PLANNING

The majority of the vintage Fenders I encountered in the 1980s were stripped or refinished, and many were modified. Most could have benefited from a thorough clean too, which is one of the things I found most encouraging about this guitar.

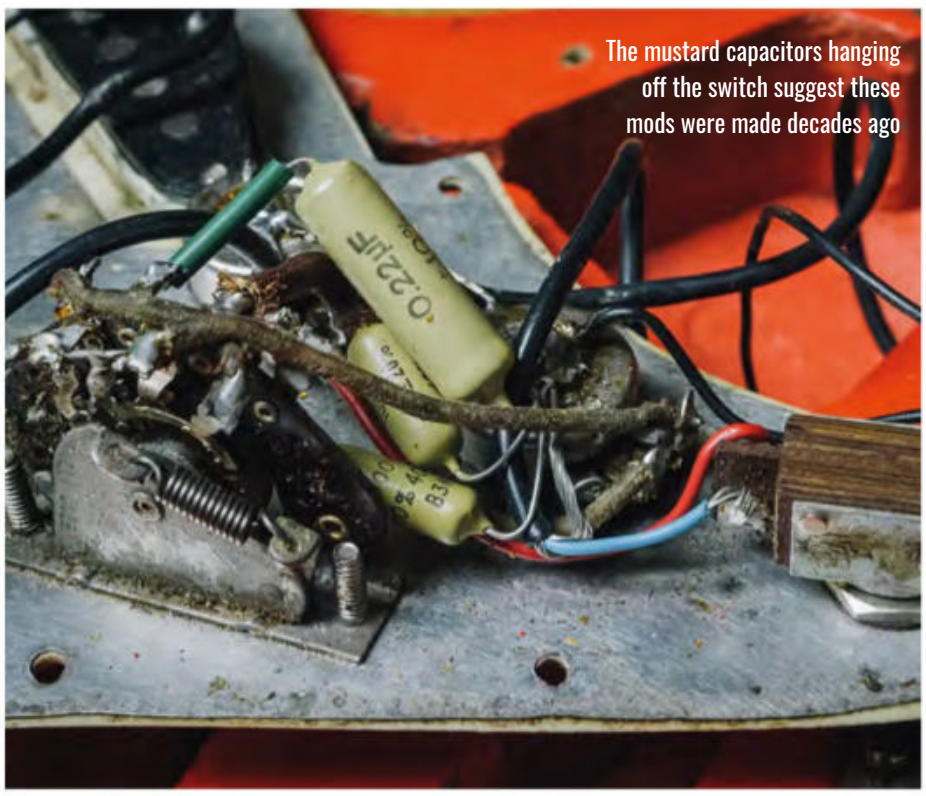
While experts can simulate lacquer checking and wood oxidisation, I have yet to see anybody replicate decades of dirt, caked-on grease and dead skin with similarly convincing results. This Strat reeked of authenticity – literally, to some extent – and we had to decide how far to take the restoration work.

Although many of the original parts were still fitted to the guitar, this was a player-grade example. Chris is a busy professional player and, as such, his requirements meant we needed a slightly different approach to the usual restoration procedure.

"The fact that it had been altered gave us carte blanche, to a certain degree," says Chris. "Nothing sacrilegious but if it's originality in place of functionality as a guitar you can actually take on tour, then there's no point for me.

"Fitting a five-way switch was a big one because we could have kept the original three-way unit but I use positions two and four a lot. The pickguard holes had to be fixed because holes in a guitar that you're going to take on the road isn't a great idea."

The previous owner clearly didn't possess a router....



The mustard capacitors hanging off the switch suggest these mods were made decades ago

We sanded the fretboard to level the tops of the slots before the divots were filled

Chris doesn't use tone controls but he rides the volume continually. With just two of the original potentiometers surviving, we decided to keep both as tone controls and install a new volume pot. A replica ceramic tone capacitor was required and all three pickups needed new hook-up wires.

Finally, something had to be done about the saddles. Vintage Stratocaster saddles tend to be costly and rusty, so we decided on a set of reproduction pressed-steel parts with vintage-correct lettering.

FRETS & BOARD

Getting the fretboard back into an acceptable condition and readying it for new frets was the toughest and most fundamental challenge. The issues included deep wear spots between many of the frets, a sizeable chip at the third fret, several deep divots, and a thick coat of milky varnish. Oh, and then there were the mismatched frets.

From fret 14 onwards, the frets were factory originals. All the others, however, had been replaced with wide, flat and low brass frets. The brass frets almost fell out but the Fender frets were reluctant to let go. The third fret slot was particularly concerning because it was excessively wide and packed with flaky glue.

There are aesthetic and practical issues involved with levelling vintage fretboards. Although they may develop divots and low spots in the high-traffic areas, the smooth surface and dark look of well-maintained vintage Brazilian rosewood fingerboards can make them look and feel amazing. For many, it's integral to the vintage guitar experience and over-restoration in this area can detract from the charm and the value of a vintage piece.

On the practical side, all the Super Glue-reinforced chips had to be levelled off, plus I needed to remove the varnish. My goal was to ensure that the frets went in level, the guitar played perfectly and the fingerboard ended up looking like nothing untoward had ever happened to it.

Some of the worn areas between the frets were so low that they almost resembled scallops and couldn't be sanded out without drastically reducing the thickness of the veneer 'board. This was never an option as far as I was concerned, and I had no intention of daubing the fretboard with paint-stripper to remove the varnish.

Chris's gut feeling about this instrument's potential was proved justified in the end

Though the high E tuner post is damaged, after cleaning, the original Klusons now operate flawlessly

Instead, I filled the worst of the divots with rosewood shavings and Super Glue, and filled the divot at the third fret with a piece of Brazilian rosewood. I also filled the third fret slot with rosewood and then re-sawed the slot.

SANDING AND FRETTING

With the fretboard repairs complete, I sanded the 'board using 320-grit paper attached to a 70cm 7.25-inch radius block. I stopped sanding once the repairs were level, because I wasn't trying to level the entire board, just the tops of the fret slots. Next, I hand-sanded with 800, 1,000, 1,500 and 2,000-grit paper, followed by ever finer grades of Micro-Mesh. The 'board ended up so dark and smooth that it reflected light but it didn't look like it had been sanded.

All the slots were scraped and vacuumed to remove all traces of sawdust and old glue, and I ran a fine triangular file across the slots to soften the top edges. I installed the frets, then levelled, crowned and polished them before removing what remained of the varnish using 0000-grade wire wool.

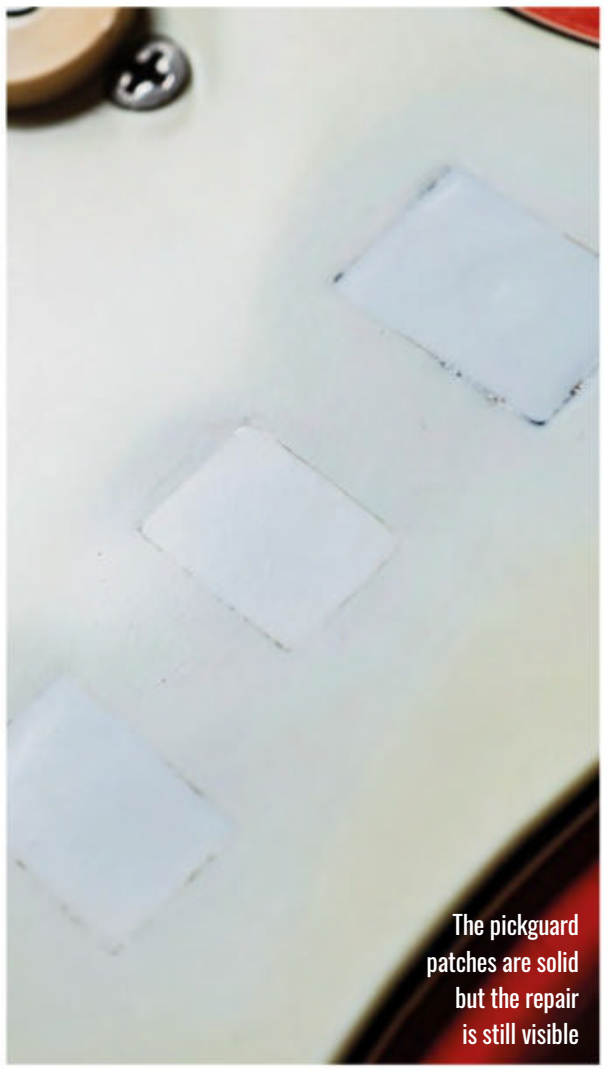
Chris's choice of vintage-style fretwire for this Strat came from allparts.uk.com (part number LT-0465-000). The tang is only 1.22mm deep, which suits vintage Fender fret slots and is narrow enough to seat securely without forcing the neck into a back bow.

GRUESOME KLUSONS

The tuners were extremely stiff and, though our initial plan was to replace them with modern repros, I gave them one last chance. After soaking in naphtha for a few hours, they were drained and flushed out with clean naphtha, which was injected with a syringe. A considerable amount of dirt, rust and metal powder was removed.

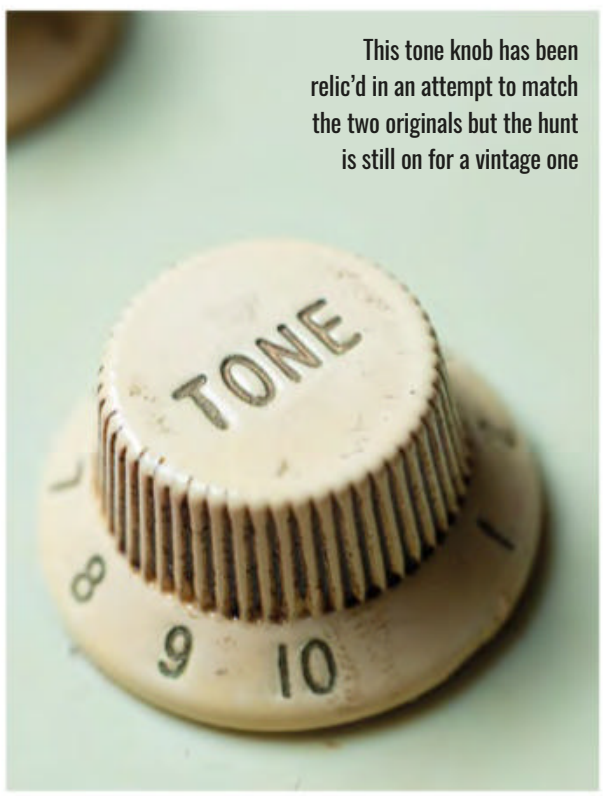
Once dry, silicone grease was injected into the casings and they began turning freely again. We'd reached an exciting milestone because Chris's Strat could now be strung up and played for the first time in decades – with the original nut shimmed up on rosewood veneer.

"All of my research into pre-CBS Strats happened after buying one," says Chris. "I tend to leap before I know what I'm going to land on. Getting into the minutiae built a level of expectation but part of me was reticent about getting too excited, given the state it was in.



The pickguard patches are solid but the repair is still visible

After repairing the fretboard and re-retting the neck, the guitar plays wonderfully



This tone knob has been relic'd in an attempt to match the two originals but the hunt is still on for a vintage one

"I was out in France at the time but, after Huw had cleaned and lubricated the tuners, he messaged me to say they were working perfectly and the tuning was rock solid. He also hinted that it sounded a bit special, so I allowed myself to get my hopes up.

"When I finally got to play the guitar unplugged, it was a memorable experience. The tuning was fantastically stable. It played beautifully and everything just gelled. Even though it didn't have any electronics in it, that was the first time I allowed myself to get really excited."

ON THE WIRE

Dismantling the guitar gave me the chance to strip out the modified wiring and assess the pickups and potentiometers. All three pickups showed strong resistance readings. The original hook-up wires, however, were long gone. I sent the pickups off to House of Tone, along with some cloth wire I'd relic'd using a combination of stain and soot.

House of Tone main-man Matthew Bascetta had his work cut out for him here, because the magnet wires were literally hanging on by a single thread, having been damaged some time ago. To his and our great relief though, the new wires were safely attached, the original coils survived the process and we could look forward to hearing some vintage Strat pickups in action.

The pots were electronically sound but they felt stiff and difficult to turn. I cleaned off the solder tags, removed the casings and dismantled them. All the parts were treated with DeoxIT D5 contact cleaner, which cleans and lubricates, before being reassembled. A 250k CTS potentiometer and five-way switch arrived from Allparts, while our reproduction ceramic cap came from fake58.co.uk. I was now all set with the electronics but first I had some holes to attend to.

PATCHING THE 'GUARD

Having never repaired a celluloid pickguard, I decided to approach it like an inlay job. I cut into the scratchplate using a Dremmel router, going just deep enough to clear the black layer but leave the bottom green layer as a ledge. I cut patches from a spare 1960s Jazzmaster 'plate, trimmed to fit and glued in place using a slurry of green celluloid shavings and acetone.

The patches were then sanded level and polished. Unfortunately, the black layer crept through the slurry and darkened the edges. The repair turned out to be solid but clearly visible, so I was less than pleased. Luckily, Chris felt otherwise. He compared the patches to "scars on an old boxer's face".

At last the pickups, pots and switch could be mounted. I was able to re-use the surviving pieces of vintage cloth wire, along with some new cloth wire relic'd to match. A tap test confirmed that everything was working, after which I mounted the pickguard back onto the guitar.

I made Chris a new bone nut and aged the repro saddles electronically, using salt water and a 12v transformer. I also relic'd a tone knob to complete the set using diluted acetone mixed with ColorTone stain. With the saddles mounted on the bridge, I strung up the guitar and set the truss-rod, the action and the intonation. Finally, the moment of truth had arrived.

REUNITED

On the morning of the auction, I'd told Chris that I didn't have a good feeling about this guitar. In the end, however, his judgement and confidence were vindicated. Listening to him play this '62 Strat for the first time has to be one of the highlights of my career as a guitar restorer. But the final thoughts about this project should be his.

"I've always been pragmatic with gear," says Chris, "so one thing that amazed me was suddenly feeling a responsibility to take care of this guitar and treat it respectfully. It has survived so long, albeit with some scars, and as its new custodian, I'm charged with making sure it continues.

"When the pickups were put back in, trying it out was a moment of trepidation.

VOLUME
TONE
TONE

Chris says the guitar is inspiring and makes him want to play more

The biggest thing for me is the pickups and just how magical they are. If all three original units had been present, I might not have appreciated quite how good they sound. I'm not denigrating the 1970s one but the discrepancy between the pickups makes me appreciate the neck and middle that bit more.

"They have an airiness and a 3D-textured nuance that's particularly nice, and they sound fantastic. I like the sound of the 1970s one but if a 1960s pickup did become available, I might put that in the bridge. I'm in no hurry though.

"This was also an opportunity to repair and respray the old refinished body but, to me, it still looks cool, and I would've wanted it to have the same vibe anyway. I've come to love the colour. It changes in different lights. It can be orangey or a subdued red, and it was probably the closest 'Dai The Paint' had to Fiesta Red in the 1970s.

"Documenting the process on YouTube put extra pressure on my shoulders. This is a holy grail guitar for a lot of people. I was being bombarded with messages asking when it was going to be finished. It also took on a life of its own on Strat forums. One thread even suggested my management had planted it there to promote me, and that it had changed hands for considerably more money than I claimed to have paid for it!

"This guitar is inspiring. It makes me want to play more. COVID-19 forced me to play it around the house before I could make some proper noise with my band, and that gave me a chance to get to grips with it. I'd never spent much time with a 7.25-inch radius board but I'm getting used to how that affects playability and the way I approach bends. When it came to playing with Buck & Evans, it sounded amazing because I was used to the way it plays and knew how to get the most from it.

"Some of my 'best' guitars aren't the ones I play the most because they don't inspire me to play particularly well. The fact that my old Strat is quirky and has idiosyncrasies and things that I have to work around makes using it as a musical instrument a more pleasurable and complete experience.

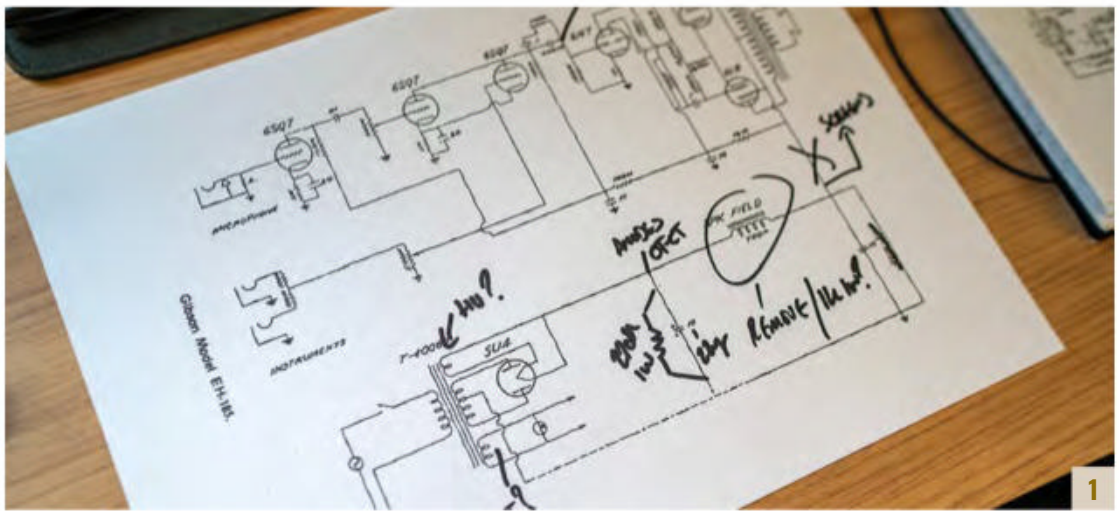
"The 'board isn't over-restored, so it feels like an old guitar under my fingers. That makes me more aware of what I'm playing, and I play it differently to other guitars. I'm pleased that, because of all the videos and forum chats, it has become *that* guitar. It has taken on a life beyond me." G

For an in-depth look at the restoration process and demos of the finished instrument, head to Tone Twins TV and youtube.com/chrisbuckguitar

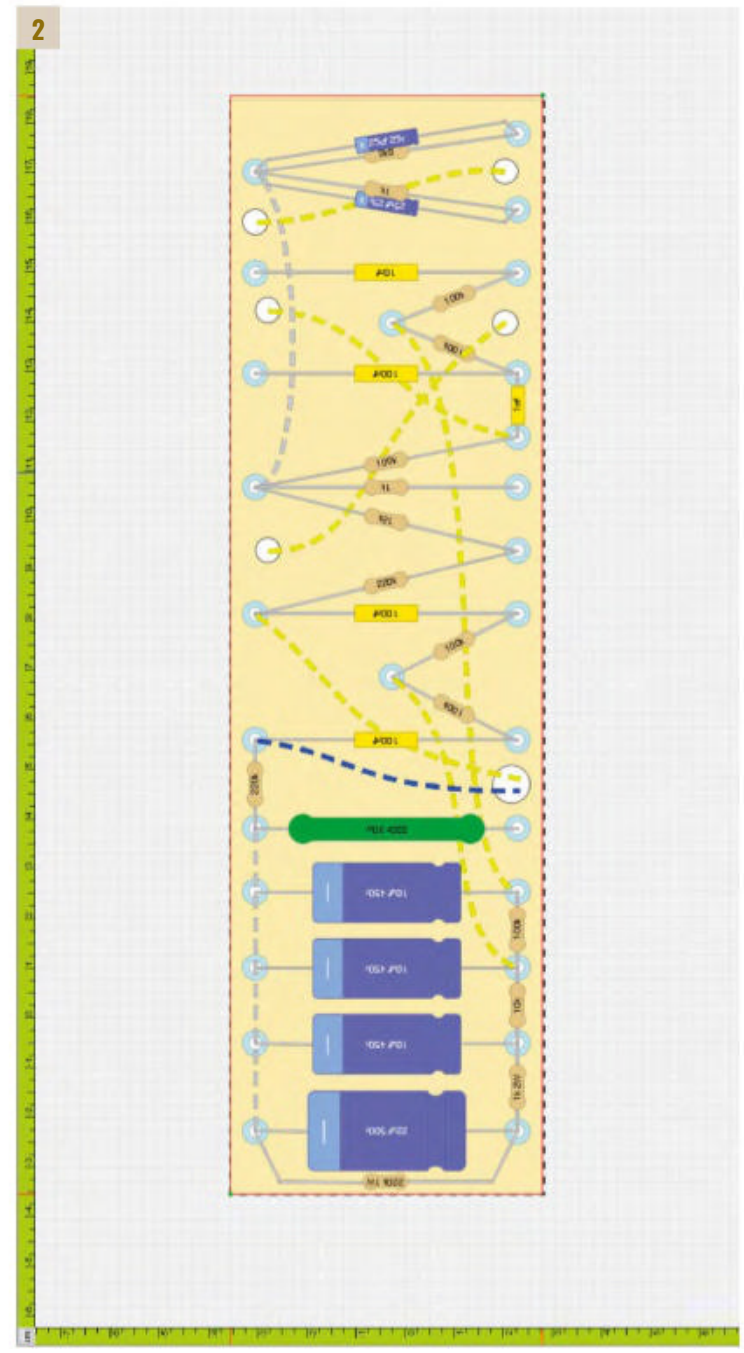
AMPLIFIER FAQ

This month, a reader's question about a pre-war Gibson amp gives Chris Fantana an excuse to break out his soldering iron

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com



1 Identifying oddities and peculiarities in the original schematic helps prevent errors in our build



2 The board layout is completed digitally

Hi, Chris. As a teenager, I used to own a Gibson EH-185 amplifier and loved it. They fetch quite the price today – could you build a clone from scratch? How would you do it?
KEN, PLYMOUTH

Hi, Ken. I often get asked about the EH-185 by jazz players and it's always been on my to-do list. There's no time better than the present to get cracking on a long-procrastinated project, so let's have a go.

My goal for this project, in the short-term at least, is to achieve a proof of concept, a working prototype that answers the simple question: can it be done? Unfortunately, I don't have an EH-185 here at the workshop so my only tonal reference will be videos found on the internet and similar. A quick search online reveals a hand-drawn schematic for the amp in question, which is a great starting point and will allow me to see the basic circuit architecture.

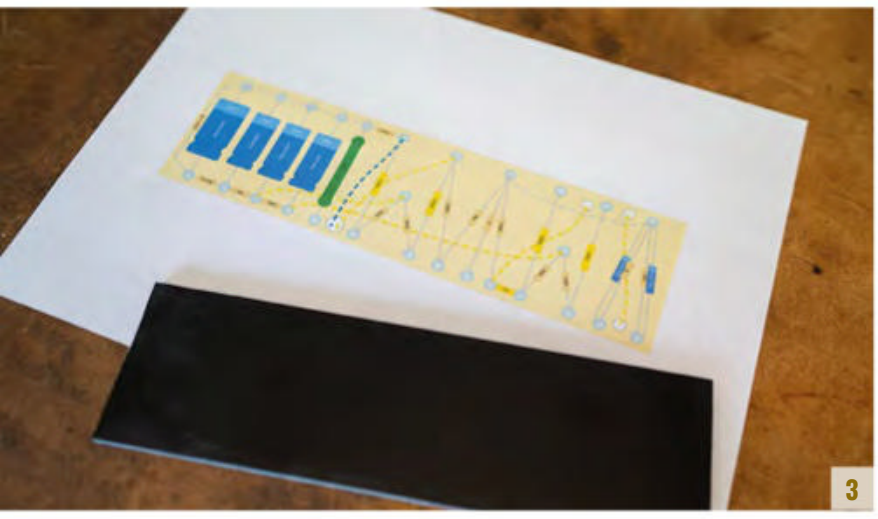
I start by studying the schematic, looking for anything unusual that might cause problems down the line. The EH-185 is quite a simple amplifier with very little between the inputs and the speaker. The amp has two channels, one labelled 'microphone' and the other 'instruments'. I would imagine that the designers envisaged that the user could use the EH-185 for both their guitar and vocals at the same time. The microphone channel has a single input socket, while there are two inputs on the instrument channel, possibly to allow a second guitar player to plug-in too.

The mic channel uses two 6SQ7 octal preamp valves before the phase inverter, yet the instrument channel only has one stage of amplification, again a 6SQ7. A rarely used 6N7 octal valve is used in this 'paraphase' phase-inverter circuit, similar to that found in the 5A3 TV front Fender Deluxe. Two cathode-biased 6L6 power valves are found in the output section, generating a stated output of 20-watts, although I suspect that might be quite optimistic.

It's all fairly standard stuff until we reach the single 12-inch speaker, which is a very old field-coil design. Rather than the permanent magnet speakers found everywhere today, these speakers use the high-voltage DC from the power supply to energise the speaker. Remember electro-magnets from science class? Exactly that.

To keep things simple, we won't use an FC speaker but a more modern PM unit instead. This is generally quite easy to do, though in the EH-185 circuit, the field coil has a secondary function as a choke in the high-voltage rail to help regulate current. We'll have to carefully design our new high-voltage supply to allow for the changes in both voltage and current draw.

My first task is to convert this schematic into a chassis layout. I'm not going to copy the original layout but draw my own instead. This has two benefits: the first is that I can optimise the position of every component and wire for the best possible design;



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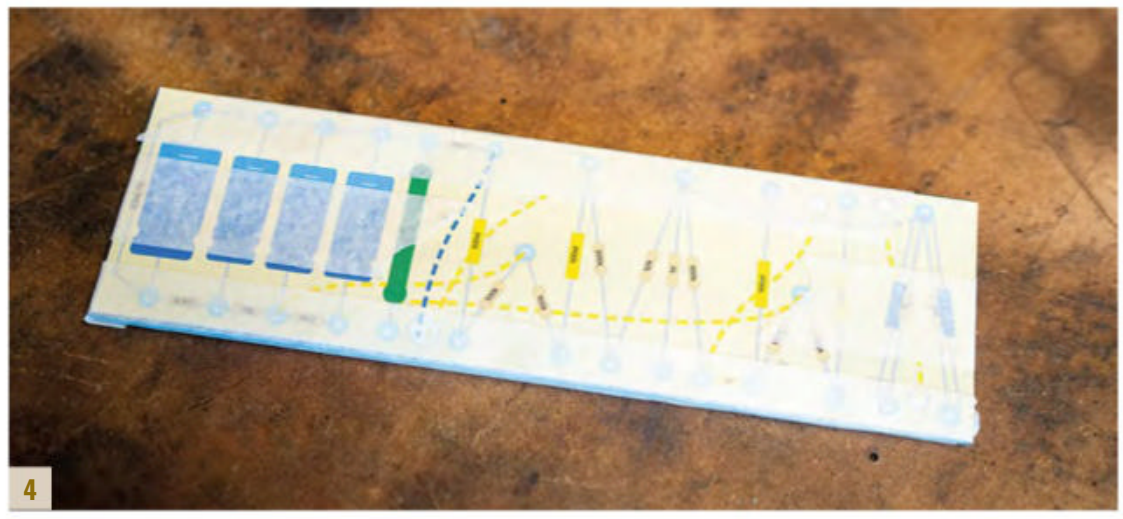

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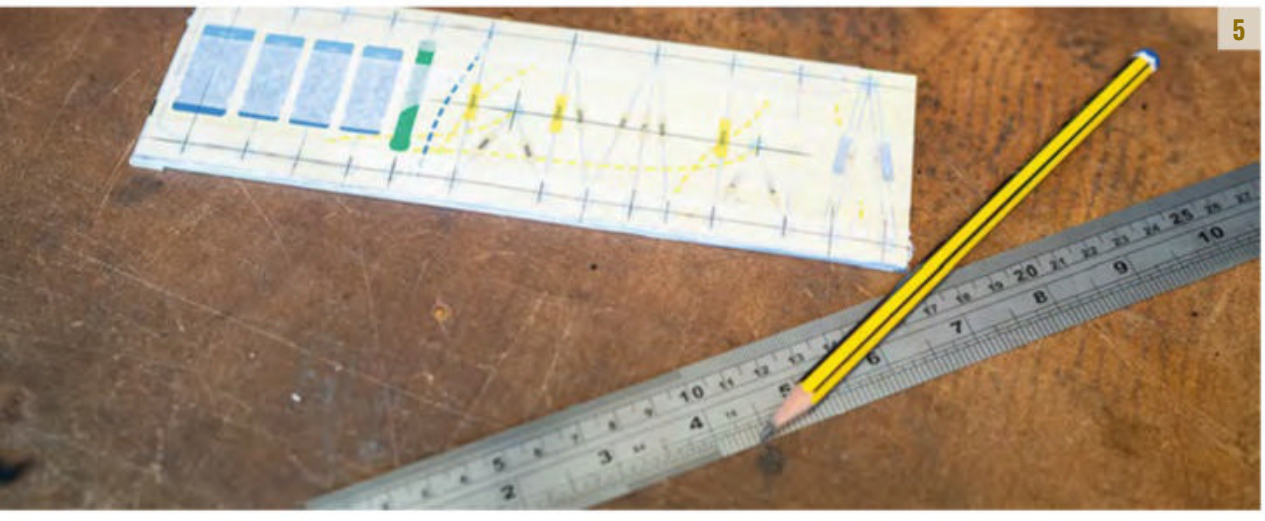

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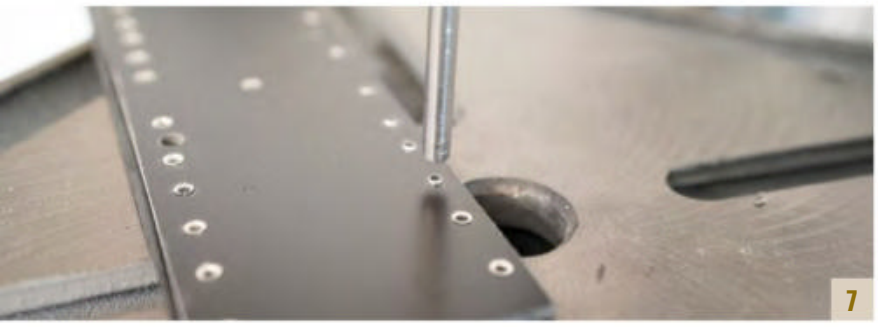

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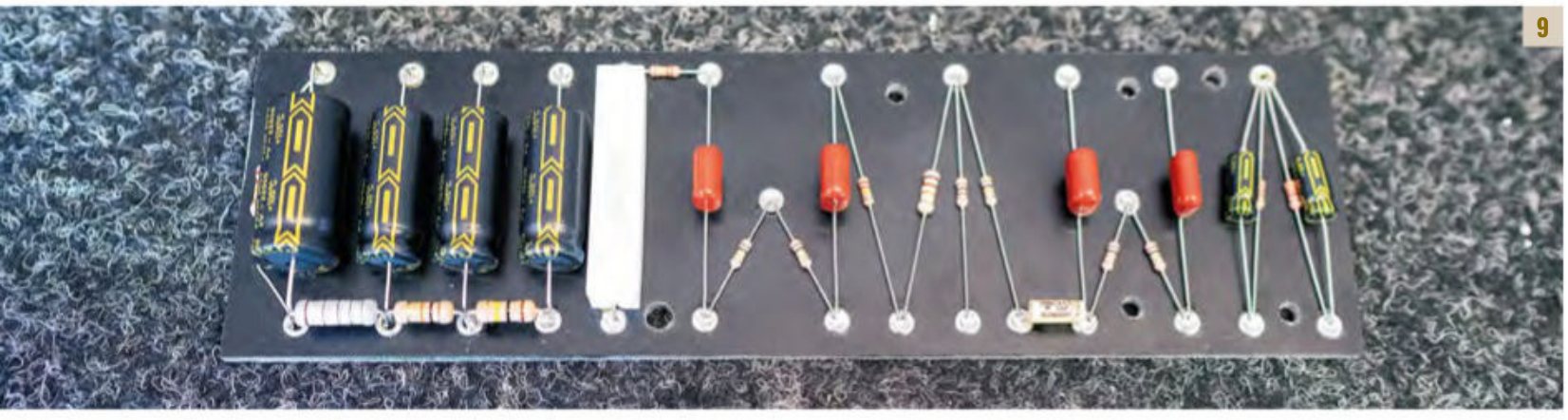

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3 It's then printed at 1:1 scale. Our board is 280 x 64mm

4 Use the printout as a drilling template to ensure correct spacing between components

5 Marking the template helps keep everything in line

6 Using a drill press, the eyelet holes are drilled out to 3.2mm

7 The eyelets are swaged into place using a special tool

8 Populating the board with components comes easily thanks to the template

9 The completed board is clean and neat

the second is that I won't be copying any mistakes or bad practices that might be in the original layout.

I like to have all of my components – or as many as possible – located on a single centralised eyelet board, with flying leads connecting everything together. I generally have the power supply on the left-hand side of the board and the preamp section on the right. This keeps the most noise-sensitive part of the circuit as far from the power supply as I can get it. Even today, mains AC is dirty enough to cause noise problems in guitar amplifiers, so I must do everything I can to keep the circuit quiet.

The layout is quite straightforward, and I've drawn similar circuits before. As this amplifier was designed pre-WWII, many of the resistor and capacitor values are no longer in production after the standardisation in 1952. For this build, I'm using the nearest modern 'standard' values and tweaking later. With that in mind, the board layout is done in such a way that replacing any component in the future will be a simple task with easy access to every solder joint.

Once the layout is complete, I print it off and attach to the board material itself before drilling out the holes using a drill press. The eyelets are then placed into the appropriate holes and then swaged into position from the underside. Populating the 220x64mm board is done with nothing more than a pair of needle-nose pliers, a pair of snips, a soldering iron and some high-quality lead-free solder. The components are placed one at a time and I like to solder them in place as I go along.

Once everything is finished, I can put the board to one side and focus on the next step of the build: the chassis. Come back next month to see how the build has progressed. G

Visit riftamps.com for more on Rift's range of British-built boutique amplifiers

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TECH TALK

OFFSET VIBRATO COMPARISON

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

The Mastery Vibrato has long been a retrofit favourite but does the Descendant knock it off its perch?

Ever since the Jazzmaster first hit the scene in 1958, the rest of us have been playing catch-up. It's true that Leo Fender's unique vision wasn't universally accepted at the time but, in the modern era, the offset body shape and sound is as beloved as ever, breaking from its former underdog status and taking its place among the other revered models of the Fender factory line-up.

Among the features that keep players coming back to the Jazzmaster (as well as its slightly younger and shorter sibling, the Jaguar) is the offset vibrato. It's responsive, stable and musical. When set up correctly, its range of pitch is as impressive as its ability to snap right back in tune.

While vintage vibratos are coveted and the US-made reissues work just fine, human nature all but requires that we find ways to build a better mousetrap – and two of the scene's biggest contenders have done just that.

Of course, we're talking about the Mastery and Descendant vibratos, each with its own spin on the more than 60-year-old Fender design. With thoughtful improvements and a few tweaks that make them well suited for a number of different playing styles and preferences, one (or both) of these aftermarket upgrades may be just the thing to suit your needs.

MASTERY

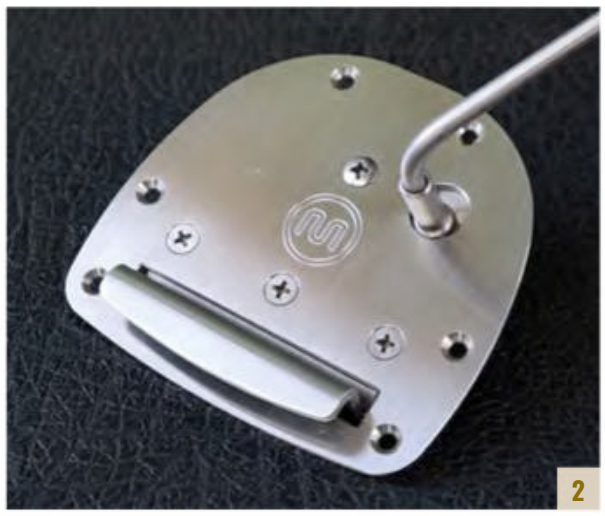
Luthier and guitar historian John 'Woody' Woodland is a familiar name to many in the guitar world. His Mastery Bridge is mounted on scores of offset instruments, and his artist roster includes such great players as Nels Cline, Thurston Moore, Jessica Dobson, Bill Frisell and Norah Jones. He has also repaired, designed and built guitars in various capacities over the years, and currently does so in conjunction with the Nothing brand, a partnership with Des Moines' Bilt guitars.

On top of that, his contributions to the collective knowledge of the guitar industry are numerous: there's his work on Andy Babiuk's book *The Story Of Paul Bigsby*; his efforts to uncover and preserve the history of Martin Guitars; and there's his in-depth research and authentication services for the recent Julien's Auction of Prince's original Cloud instruments.

It's this wealth of knowledge, as well as Woody's genuine love for the guitar, that informs the design of the Mastery Vibrato. It's firmly rooted in that familiar Fender blueprint but that's not to imply that it's a cheap replica or recreation. You might even call it a remaster.

The Mastery Vibrato hones the primitive mechanics of those early Patent Pending designs to perfection. Take, for instance, the thicker faceplate, which prevents the sinking caused by spring tension that can be found in some thinner vintage parts.

It's undeniable that the Mastery is often smoother in operation than some stock units. Part of that comes down to the fit of the string-anchor plate and internal pivot plate, and the full-width contact between them, instead of the two tiny outcroppings under the E strings. This may also be what causes the added body and resonance that you'll notice when swapping a stock part for the Mastery.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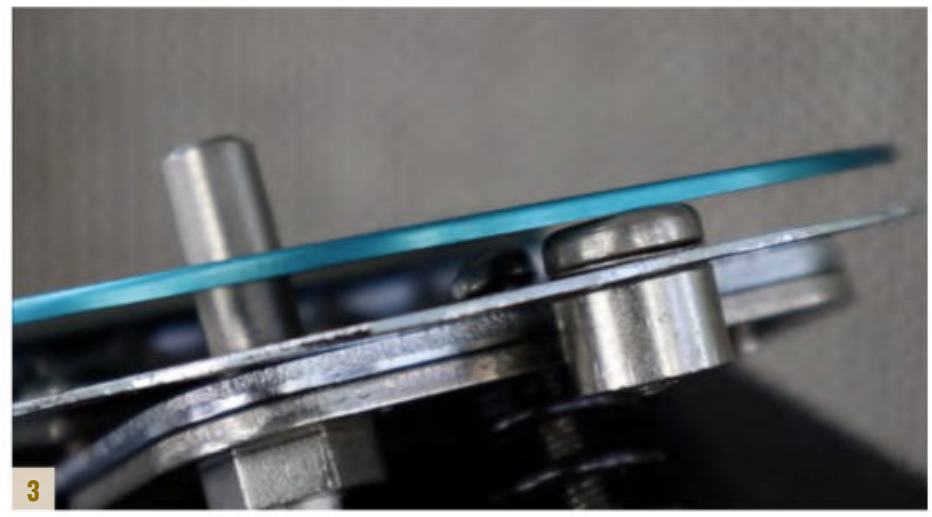
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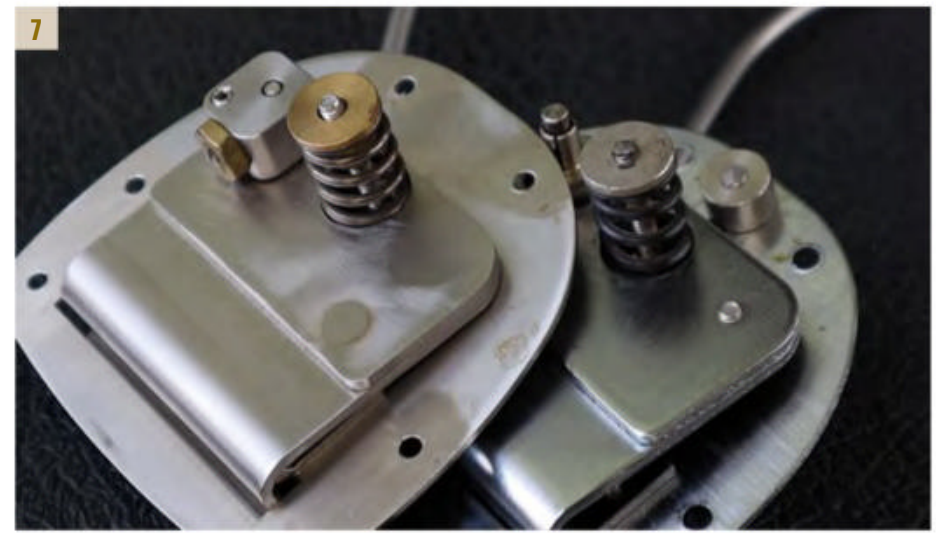
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1 Three vibratos, sitting in a row

2 The Mastery OMV in its brushed stainless steel finish. Note the countersunk screws for reduced string breakage

3 The Mastery body plate (pictured in the limited anodised turquoise finish) is much thicker than that of the '61 vibrato beneath it

4 The Mastery vibrato's string-anchor plate

5 The Mastery has full contact between the anchor and pivot plates

6 The Patent Pending vibrato from 1961 has two prongs that make contact between the anchor and pivot plates

7 Spring comparison: Mastery (left) and '61 Fender part

The increased tension of the Mastery's spring also accounts for its smoothness; its arm requires more pressure to actuate than those familiar with reissue Fender vibratos might expect. This sturdier carbon-steel spring lends a taut feel to the downward movement of the strings, a feature that's in line with the feel and operation of vintage vibratos from the 1958-1962 model years. These vibratos are all but legendary for their stiffer operation, and the Mastery pays homage to that tradition with ample resistance of its own.

The player can adjust spring tension the same way they would with any other unit, via the centre screw on the body plate. This lets you set the overall feel of the vibrato for more or less resistance, as well as how high the arm sits off the body. With no Trem-Lock button (Fender's mechanical tuning memory in case of string breakage) the Mastery lacks a guide for setting tension. But this shouldn't scare off potential users. Our advice is best summed up by the words of Qui-Gon Jinn: "Feel, don't think. Use your instincts."

The Mastery vibrato is almost entirely made of stainless steel, and each stainless arm is mated to its particular vibrato by Mastery's assembly staff, ensuring a tight and rattle-free fit. The amount of swing can be fully adjusted by the player but this requires the unit be removed from the body. It only takes a few moments, however, to make the change.

Underneath, you'll find a screw and bolt on the arm housing (collet). To change the arm's swing, simply loosen the bolt with pliers, then use a flathead screwdriver to set the amount of play and tighten the nut again to finish. As is the case with original Fender vibratos, it's not recommended that you remove and replace the arm often, as this can wear on the fit between the collet and the arm itself.

All of the Mastery's fittings are beautifully rendered and polished smooth, and the pivot-plate mounting screws are countersunk, which all but eliminates the likelihood of string breakage at the ball end, a common issue with offset guitars.

With the Mastery vibrato, the strings are loaded from the rear of the unit, with the ball ends hidden beneath the awning of the anchor plate, just as they are on the original Fender vibrato.

The Mastery is available in right and left-handed models, and there are two main finish options for its stainless steel faceplate: brushed ($180) and highly polished ($200), as well as limited-edition runs in black, gold, and many other colours of the rainbow, so there's surely something our there to match your offset, whatever its style.

The Mastery is designed for a universal fit too, which means it can be retrofitted onto vintage, AVRI, MIJ/CIJ, and Squier guitars with ease. As well as the Jazzmaster and the Jaguar, the Mastery is a fantastic fit for baritone builds too. It even fits snugly on the mighty Bass VI.

If you're looking for an uncomplicated yet utterly solid vibrato for your guitar, and one that changes the feel but not the look, the Mastery vibrato is a superb choice – but it's not your only choice.

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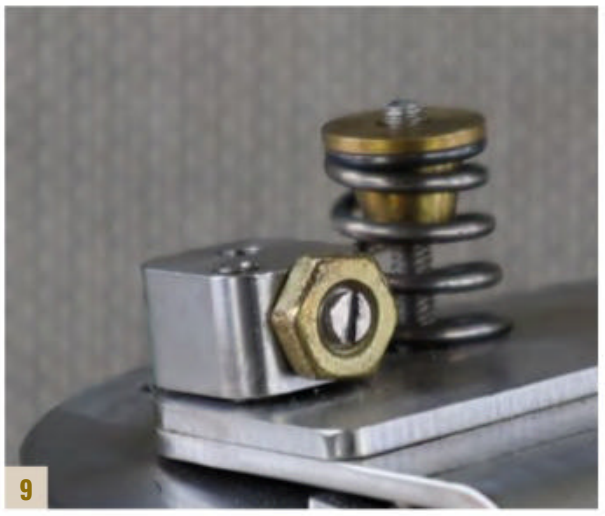
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8 Spring tension adjustment on a black Mastery unit

9 This mechanism changes how freely the arm swings

10 To adjust the swing, loosen the bolt

11 Use a flathead screwdriver to loosen the screw for more swing or tighten for a firmly planted arm. Tighten the bolt again to lock it down

12 The Mastery next to the original '61 vibrato

13 Chris Swope's toothy Descendant Vibrato

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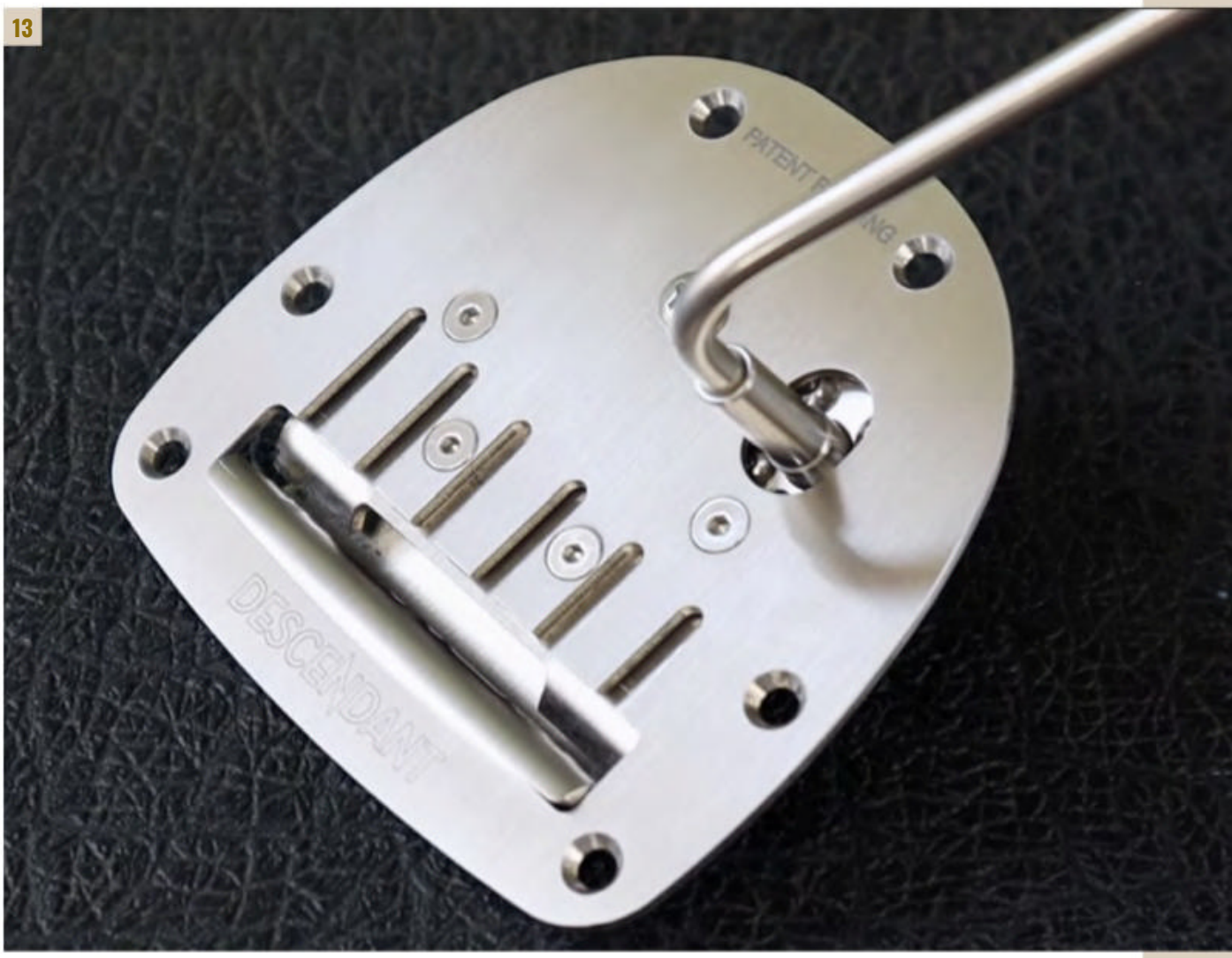

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DESCENDANT

A relative newcomer to the offset scene, the Descendant Vibrato comes to the world by way of luthier Chris Swope, a former employee of Roger Sadowsky, as well as the Gibson Custom Shop. His own guitars under the Swope brand have landed in the hands of the Stones' Ron Wood, John Oates of Hall & Oates, and guitar-slinger Andrew Sovine. They're meticulously made and immensely playable instruments with unbridled personality.

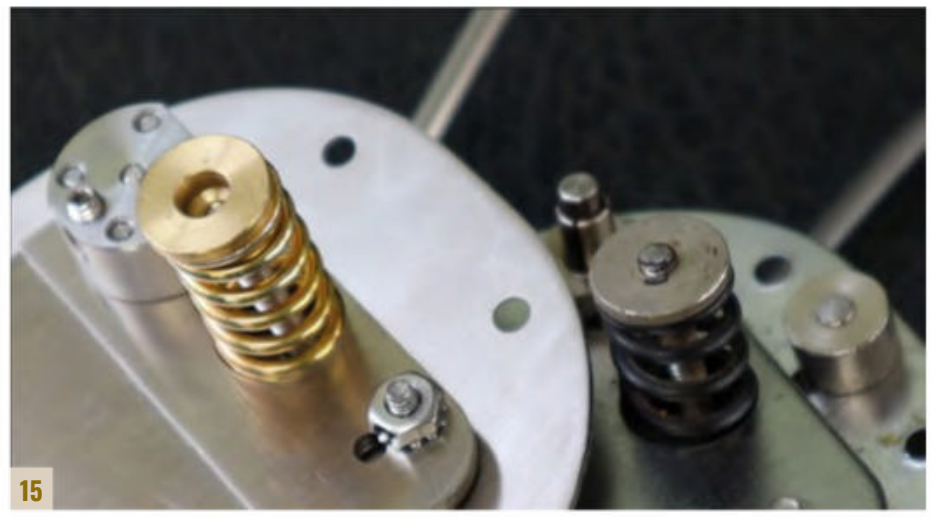
The same can be said of the Descendant Vibrato. Dressed in stainless steel and with an industrial look thanks to its 'teeth' that enable the strings to dip beneath the body plate freely.

As a vibrato, the Descendant feels stiffer than US reissues but less stiff than the Mastery and early 1960s Pat Pend parts. That's not to say it's a bad thing – on the contrary, this could be viewed as a bonus for players with a lighter touch. It's still very smooth and, in our experience, requires less force to depress the arm.

Ultimately, we're talking shades of difference here and, if you're picking a vibrato purely on the basis of its stiffness, this will come down to personal preference. Some players may not even register such a minute variation, so we wouldn't say one is necessarily an advantage over the other, just an option. Still, should you require more or less resistance, you can adjust the Descendant's spring tension in the same manner as previously mentioned, via a screw adjacent to the arm housing.

The Descendant is an attractive if not stylistically confident part, with a busier and more mechanical look than the deceptively simple air of the originals. Leo Fender often covered the internals of his designs with swooping ashtrays to bestow them with a more sleek and space-age look. In contrast, Chris Swope has ensured that his pragmatic design wears its complexity on its stainless steel sleeve – and it's that complexity that sets his vibrato apart from many other aftermarket products.

14


15

14 The teeth, or cut-outs, of the vibrato allow the strings to pass beneath the body plate freely

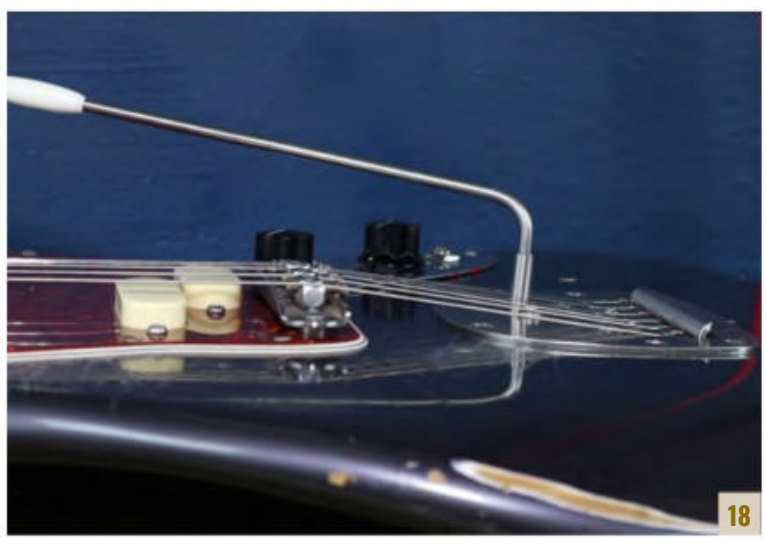
15 The Descendant's spring is different in both look and feel to those of the Mastery and Fender units

16

17

16 The Descendant has a modern look. Note the strings' paths beneath the body plate toward the anchor

17 The Descendant's drop-down plates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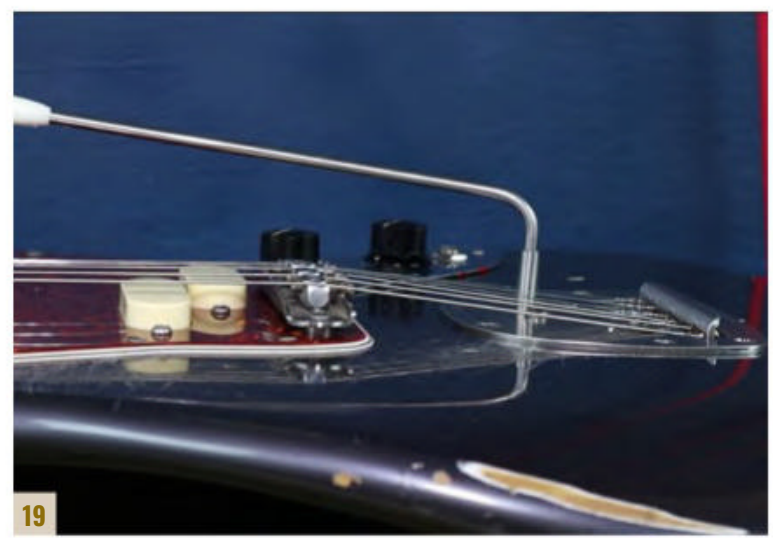
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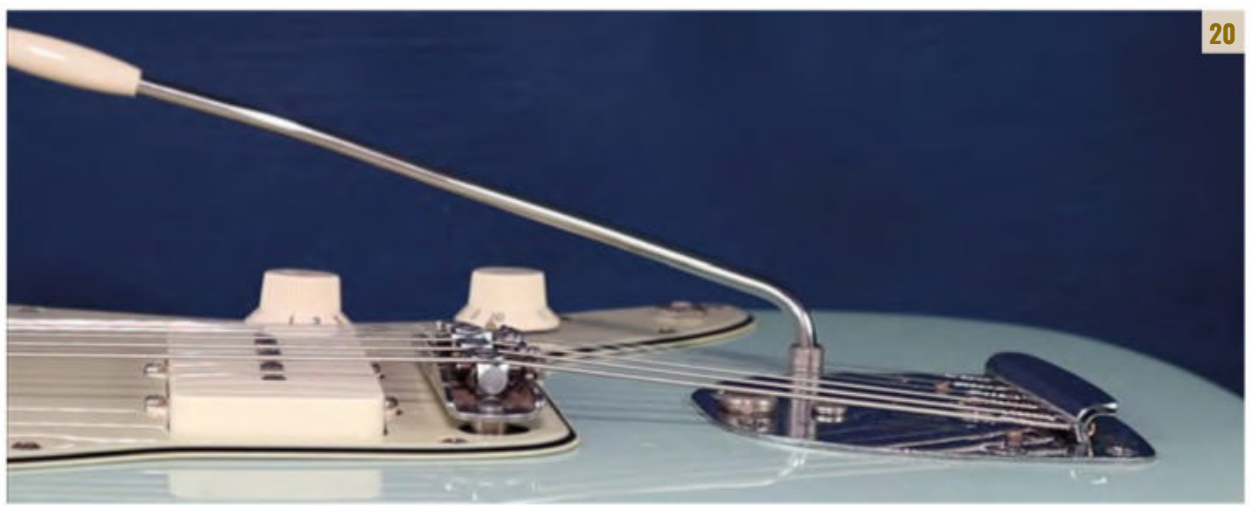
18 With both plates installed, the strings sink below the body plate. This increased downward angle greatly increases force on the bridge. Compare the height of the arm to that in the next picture

19 With only one plate installed, the strings slightly breach the surface. This still increases downward pressure on the bridge but to a lesser extent. In our case, this was necessary to string the unit. This is a problem with this 1963 body but none of the other instruments we tried exhibited this routing anomaly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20 This is a '63 vibrato mounted on a 2007 Thin Skin Fender Jazzmaster

The crux of Swope's design is its ability to sink a guitar's strings below the surface level of its body, increasing the downward force on the bridge, resulting in improved resonance, as well as the strings' perceived playing tension, or compliance. This is totally unlike anything else on the market, and the deed is done by way of the two removable drop-down plates that come pre-installed in each Descendant vibrato. Whether or not you need both plates is up to you; every guitar is different and may not require both.

On my '63 Jaguar, for instance, I found that the combination of both plates wasn't necessary to achieve the kind of feel I was after and, with only one installed, my short-scale guitar indeed sounded a bit louder and had a stiffer feel. The difference between the number of installed plates seems less noticeable on guitars with the full 25.5-inch scale length.

The angle of the strings flowing from the bridge to the string anchor has a deleterious effect on behind-the-bridge resonance. Whether or not that's a good thing will likely depend on the player. To be sure, you can still strum the length of string between the bridge and tailpiece and hear them but general sympathetic vibrations from hard strumming seem to be greatly reduced.

The Descendent is strung not from the rear but from the front of the unit thanks to Chris Swope's anchor-plate keyhole design. To string, insert the ball end of the string into the enlarged centre hole and slide to the right or left depending on which string you're working with. From there, just string as you normally would.

Our first time stringing the unit was admittedly tricky, an issue compounded by both inexperience as well as the routing of my vintage Jaguar body. With both plates installed, the string-anchor plate was so close to the rear edge of the vibrato cavity that the ball ends couldn't be fully inserted through the keyhole.

Thankfully, removing the second drop-down plate mostly alleviated the issues and made it far easier to string in this instance.

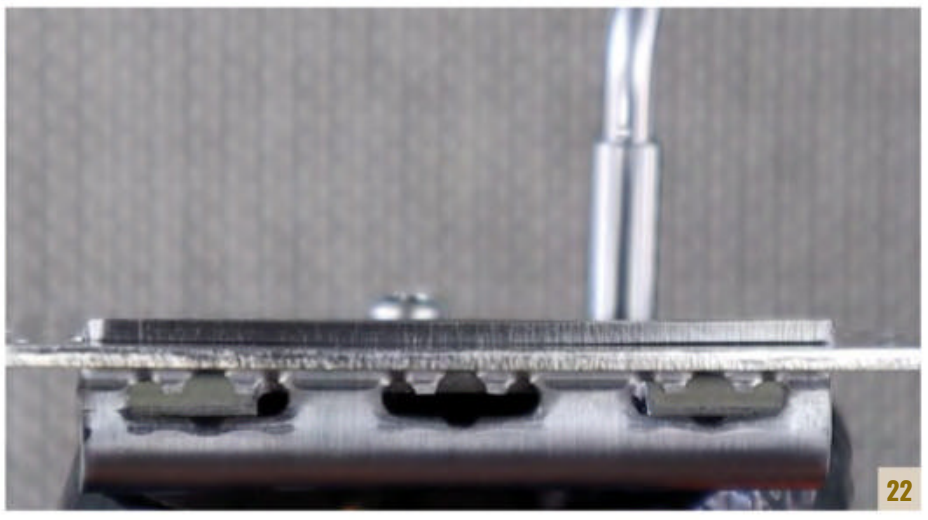
21 The Descendant is strung from the front rather than the rear of the unit

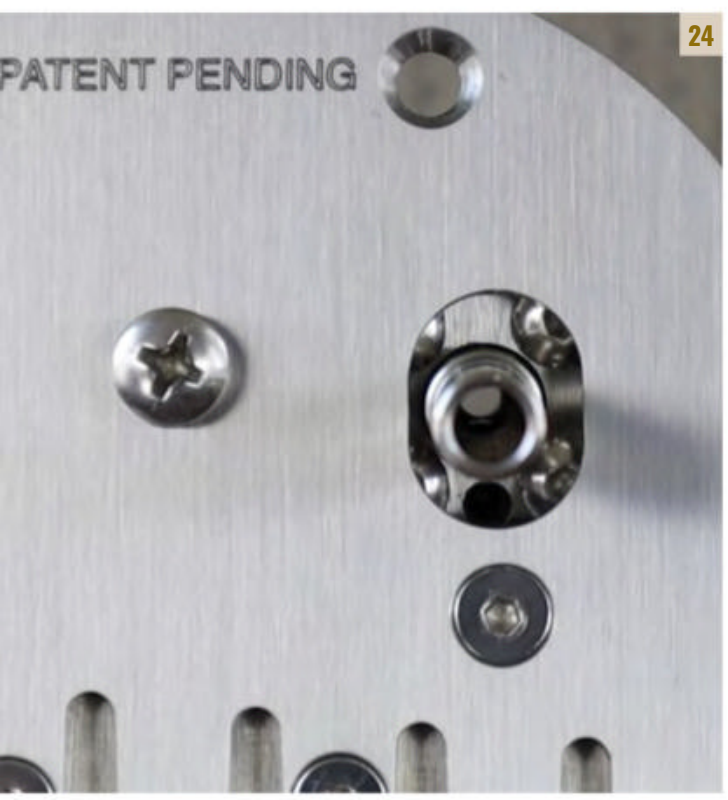
22 The ingenious Descendant anchor-plate keyhole design

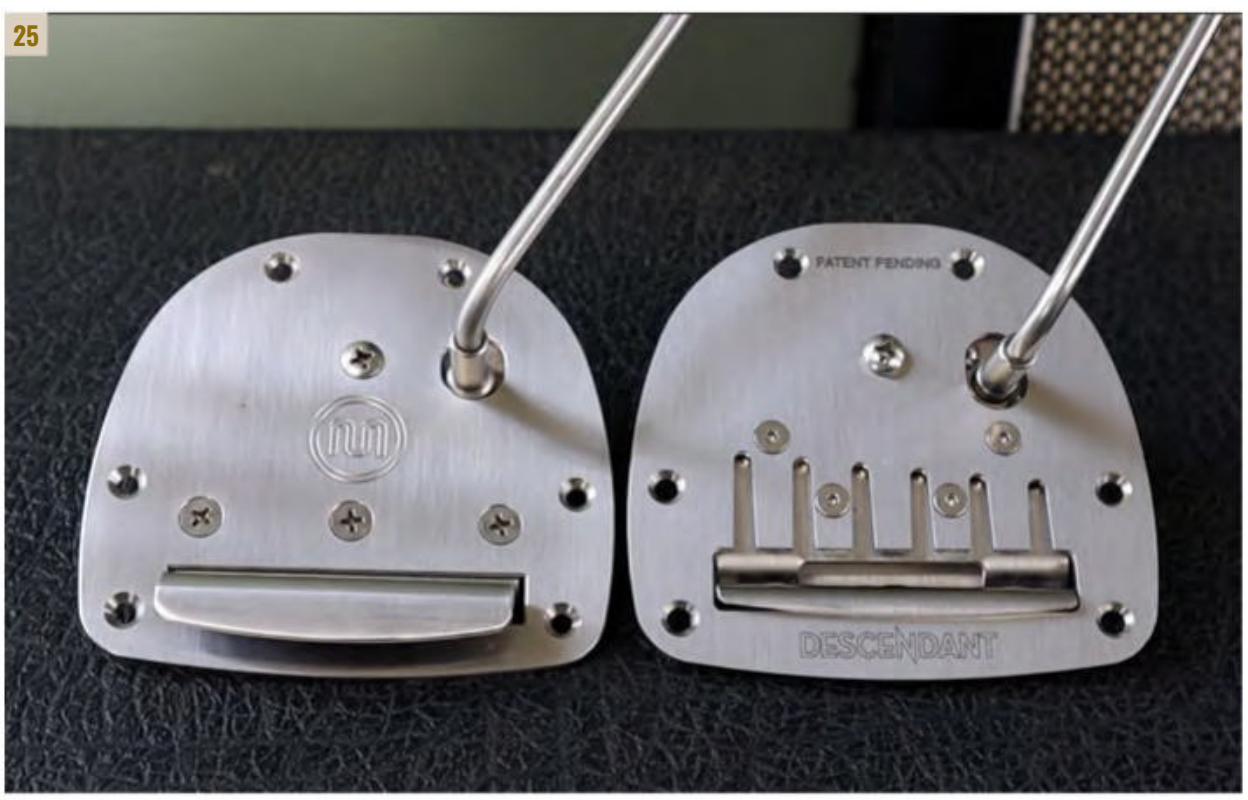
23 The string is inserted in the oversized circular hole in the middle and slid to either side to secure

24 Adjusting the amount of swing in the arm is done from the front of the unit via an Allen screw beneath the tubular arm housing

25 The Mastery (left) and Descendant vibratos







This issue was not present with any of the other vintage bodies we tested, which seems to be indicative of the inconsistencies found in the Fender factory's early output rather than an issue with the Descendant itself.

When strung, the strings are meant to dip below the vibrato's face plate, a feat made possible by the cut-outs that correspond to each string's position. They're both wide enough and long enough to ensure that there's no chance of the usual string gauges catching on them, even with both drop-down plates are in use.

One caveat here: with much larger string gauges such as those used on the Bass VI, those cut-outs can make inserting the ball end and sliding it to one side of the keyhole a slightly fraught process. It can work but it takes some doing. With Bass VI gauges, there also exists the potential for contact between the string and the sides of the cut-outs.

The mechanism for adjusting for the amount of play in the arm is accessed from the face of the unit, enabling on-the-fly changes for different playing styles. This truly is a tinkerer's dream, and could prove particularly useful in studio environments, where it would allow for a quick change between stiff and more pliable arms for shoegaze-style dipped strumming.

Additionally, the arm itself is designed to be removed easily at the apex of its swing in the playing position. To remove, rotate the arm so that the tip is pointing toward you and pull it out. No need to fret about wear and tear here.

Chris Swope's Descendant Vibrato feels fantastic and sounds excellent. It affords the user more adaptability, as well as some 21st century quality-of-life features that make it a powerful piece of kit. If you're looking for a vibrato with more control over break angle and string path, as well as a more futuristic look, the Descendant is a strong option. It's available in right and left-handed versions for $175.

Both the Mastery and the Descendant are distinctive, well-equipped vibratos that may be more alike than they are dissimilar, so it's important to understand the features unique to each. Separately, these vibratos approach the Leo Fender design in an interesting way, so ultimately it's up to the player to decide which best fits their needs.

Visit youtube.com/theguitarmagazine to see Mike put the Mastery and Descendant units through their paces

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ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PLAY BLUES LIKE **ALBERT KING**

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

As we continue our journey through the guitar styles of the legendary Three Kings, this time we turn to the Flying V-toting blues icon Albert

The impact of Albert King's playing is as much about the guitarists he influenced as the way he played himself – without Albert's music, we might not have Stevie Ray Vaughan or Eric Clapton. But that doesn't mean that King's playing isn't important in and of itself.

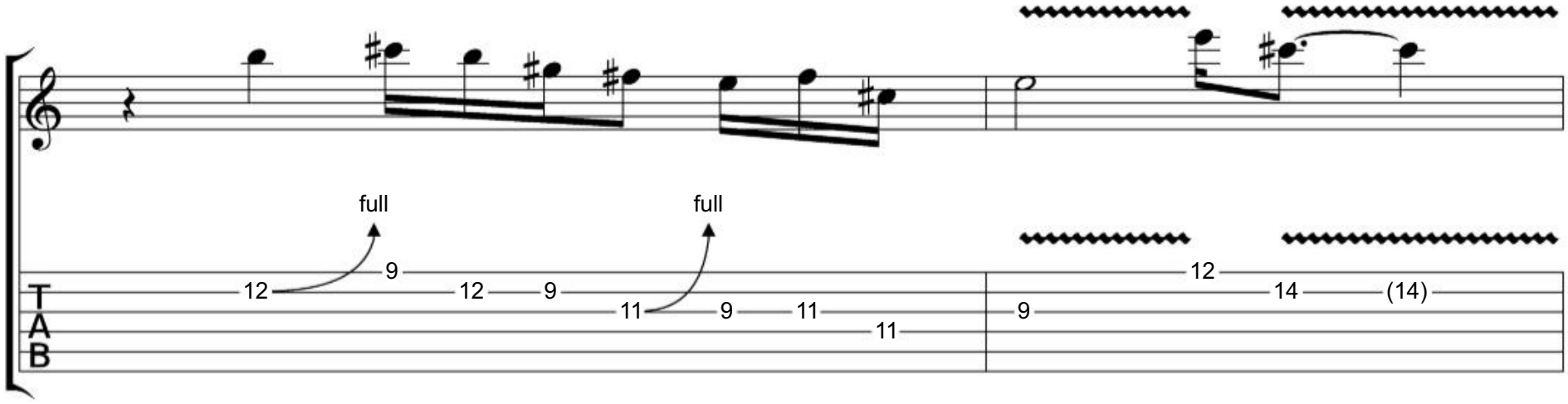
With his right-handed Flying V strung conventionally but played left-handed, the Mississippi native's style was always going to be different. But King's unconventional set-up doesn't account for the raw, dramatic power of his playing, often littered with jaw-dropping bends often two tones in width.

If you haven't heard it recently, before we get into this lesson, stick on his iconic 1967 LP *Born Under A Bad Sign* and bask in the genius of one of the true kings of the blues.

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He has taught hundreds of students face to face and via the MGR Music platform. He has more than 10 years' experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher. To find guitar tutors in your area, visit mgrmusic.com

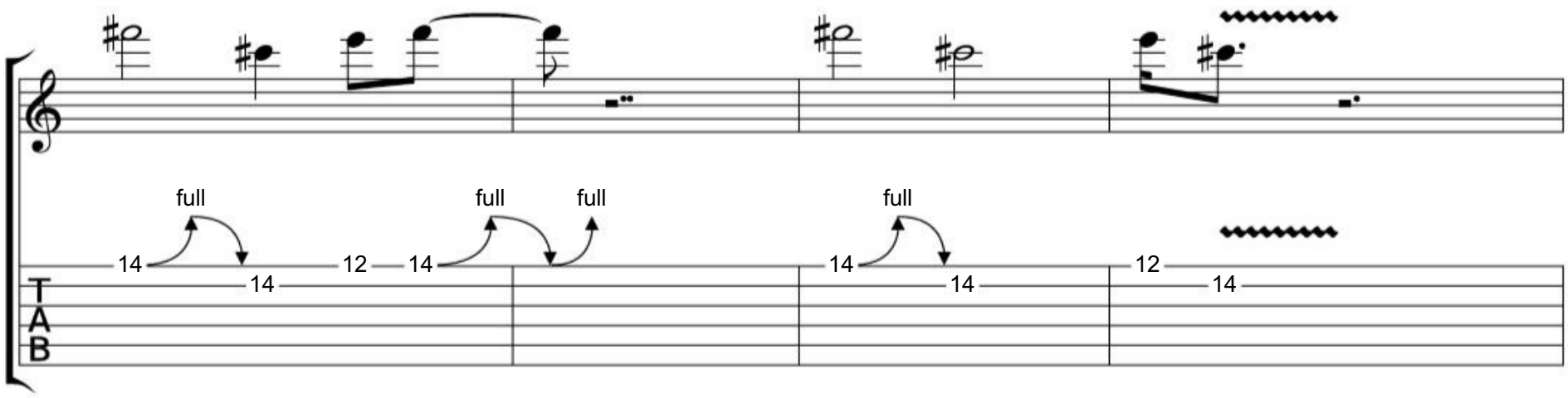
LICK 1

This first lick, like all those here, is in the key of C♯ minor, and is a typical Albert King-style run. Begin with a bend on beat 2 of bar 1, followed by a run down the first shape of the minor pentatonic scale. By not coming in on the first beat, you'll give the part a slinky behind-the-beat feel. The second bar uses the second shape of the scale to pull off a textbook King lick, which remains a go-to for Eric Clapton.



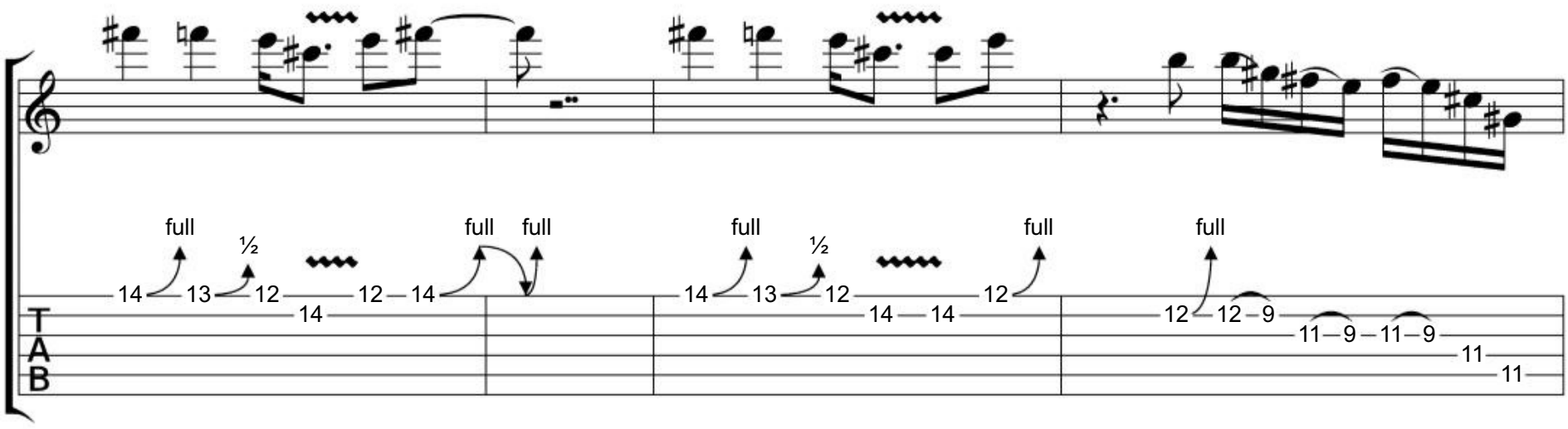
LICK 2

The double bend is a hallmark of King's solos and you'll see one at the end of bar 1 below. Bend the 14th fret up a tone, release it and bend it up again as the bars cross over. The rest of the lick demonstrates how you don't need many notes to make a great guitar part – there are only three in the whole thing.



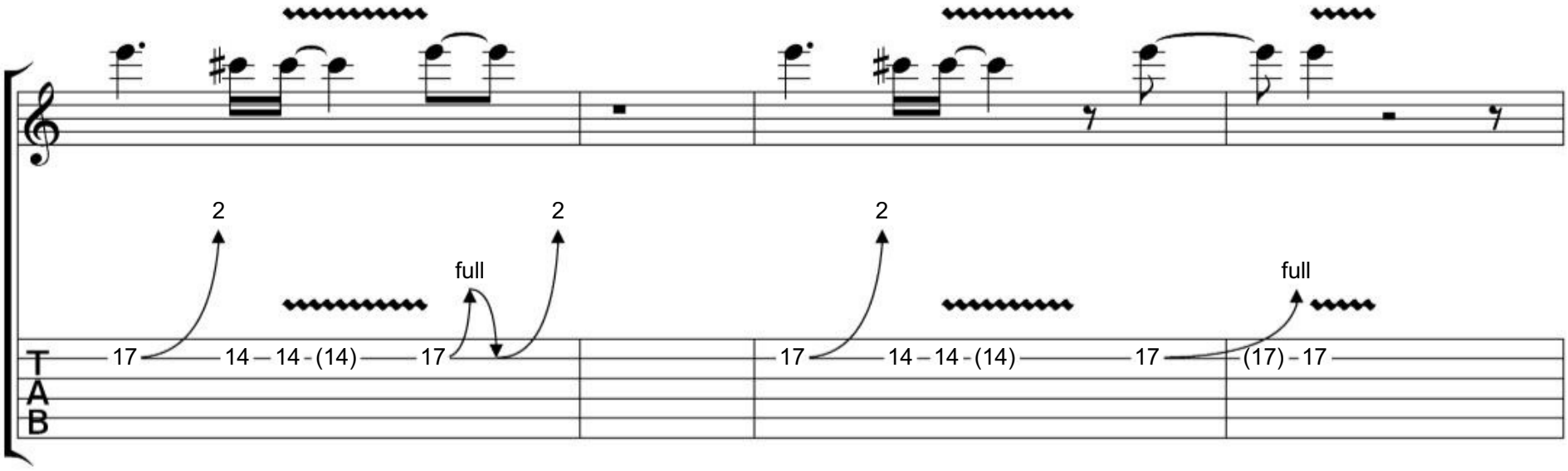
LICK 3

Sometimes a ‘wrong’ note can be effectively used in blues playing to create interesting textures, something King was a master of. In this case, the F on the 13th fret of the top E string does not sit well in the minor pentatonic scale. The trick, however, is to bend it up half a step so that it’s in key, creating an effect that sounds not unlike slide guitar.



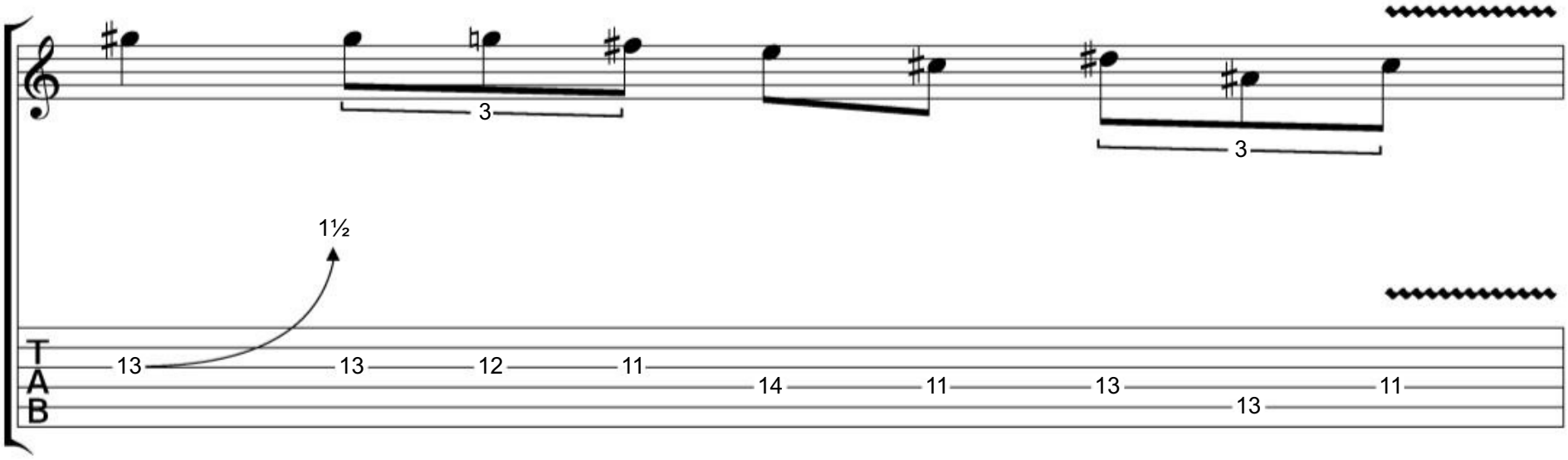
LICK 4

You can’t examine Albert King’s playing without tackling some huge, ambitious overbends. This lick is based around the third shape of the minor pentatonic scale and features some two-tone bends, which will take some practice. Here, you’re bending the 17th fret up to the pitch of the 21st. Play the target note first of all and get that in your head, then attempt the bend – King used light (0.009-0.052) strings, which made these big bends easier. The first bar ends with a double bend. Complete the first, full-tone bend and release it to the starting pitch, then push it up two tones without repicking the note.



LICK 5

This example uses the second shape of the minor pentatonic scale in the lower strings. It’s made up of some note patterns that may initially feel a little unusual under the fingers, as it begins with a tone-and-a-half bend before a three-note chromatic rundown. This lick features triplets on beats 2 and 4 so be careful of the timings. This lick ends on the root note, making it an apt part to play if you’re returning to the I chord as part of a 12-bar blues structure.



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CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY CHORDS LIKE PAUL SIMON PART 2

WORDS ROD FOGG

In part two of our look into the chord shapes and sequences that define Paul Simon's sound, we focus on his early years as a solo artist

Paul Simon's solo career began in 1970 with the break-up of his 14-year collaboration with Art Garfunkel. The early solo years were a purple patch for him, with the consecutive release of three successful studio albums. In 1986, after something of a career slump, he bounced back with *Graceland*, which went on to become his most successful solo album. Influenced by a variety of world music, the record reached No.1 in many countries and sold 12 million copies around the world.

As Simon's solo career developed, there were significant changes in the music he wrote. The chords he used became more extended, including ninth, augmented, seventh, ♭5 and major seventh chords. While many of these flavours are associated with jazz, Simon's music never became jazzy. Instead, he simply wrote pop music with an expanded chord palette.

Another area of development for Simon was the use of longer chord sequences, often eight bars or more without repeated sections, with chord following chord before finally returning back to the top or moving onto a bridge, which would sometimes be in an unrelated key.

One of the more novel aspects of songs from this period is the occasional use of keyboard rather than Simon's mainstay acoustic guitar to outline the chords of the song. As you'll see, this can make some of these chord sequences particularly tricky to play on guitar

Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), the *Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

FIGURE 1

Let's kick off with a chord sequence inspired by a keyboard intro. You'll need to fingerpick this one. It includes some surprising 'outside' chords, such as C and F7♭5, which are far from the E major/C♯m tonality the passage begins with. For added interest, try playing it in a waltz-like three time. If you feel short-changed at the end because it's not an eight-bar sequence, don't worry – at this stage in his career, Paul Simon wrote like that.

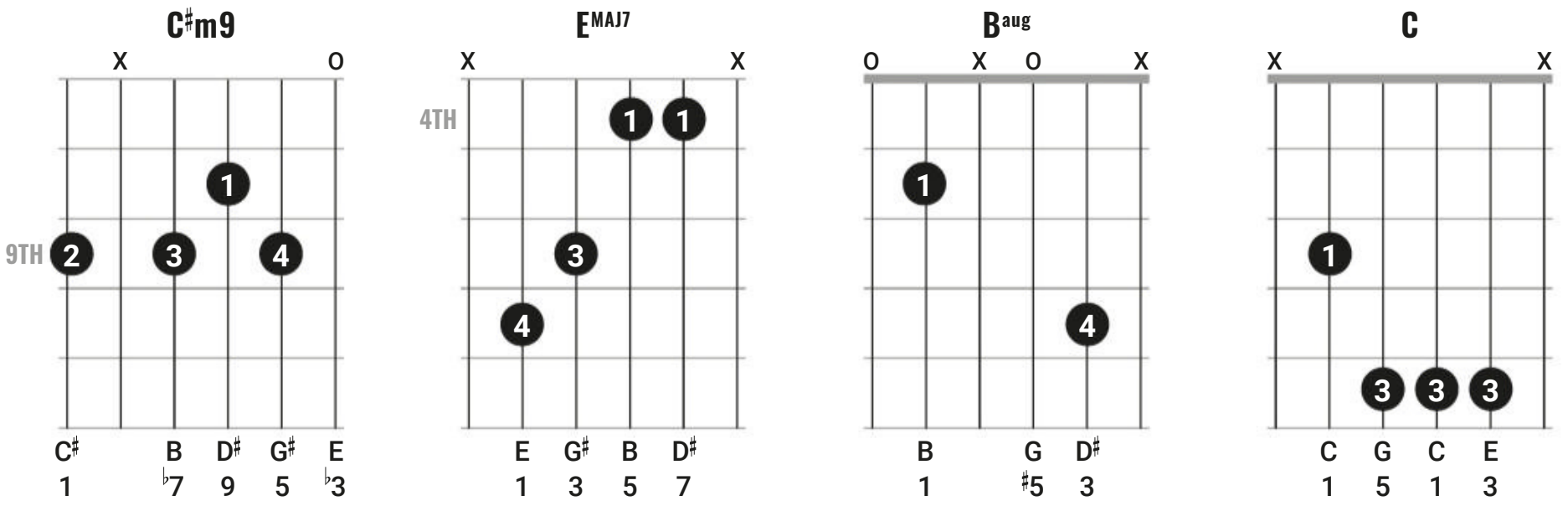


FIGURE 2

Here is a sequence that makes a four-bar loop, with a jazzy blues flavour. Bm7♭5 contains all the notes of G9 except the root, so in the context where it's following G7, it functions as a G9 chord. Stick with fingerstyle for this example, playing the bass note first and then adding the upper notes as a chord or arpeggio.

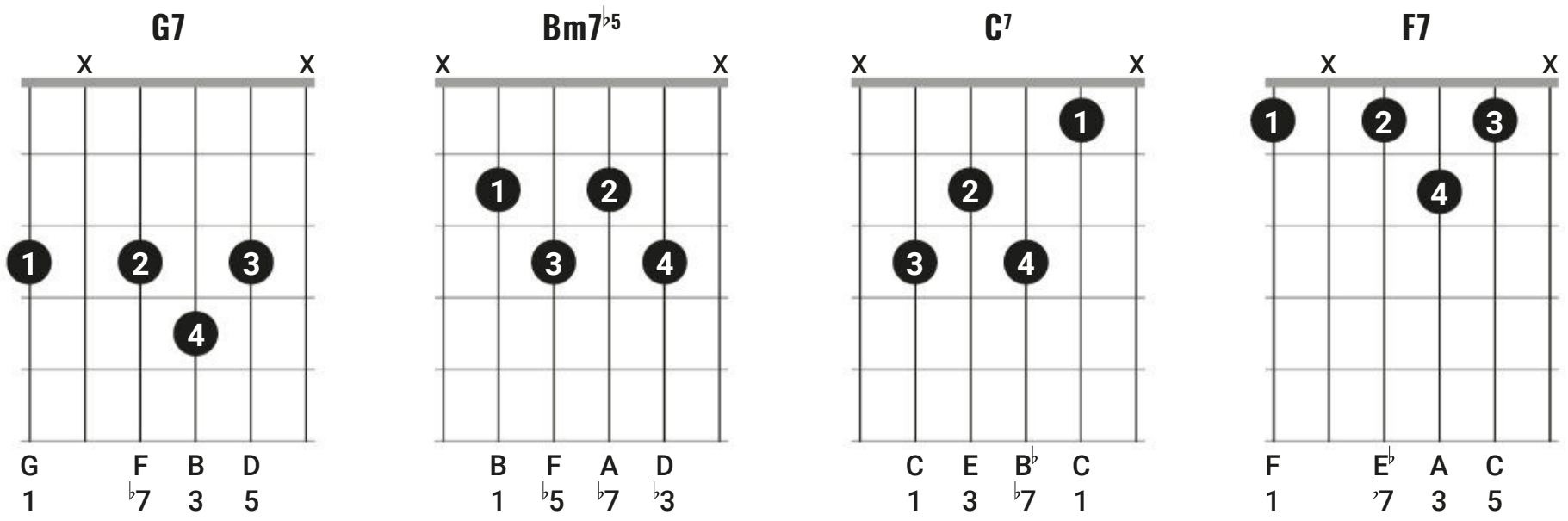


FIGURE 3

Once again, you're in extended-chord territory here, with a major seventh chord, a slash chord and a diminished seventh, written here as o7 instead of the optional dim7. Separate out the bass note on this example too. If it seems inconclusive as a four-bar sequence, try adding G, C and then G again. Experiment with the shapes you've used so far – major, seventh or major seventh – and see which ones work for you.

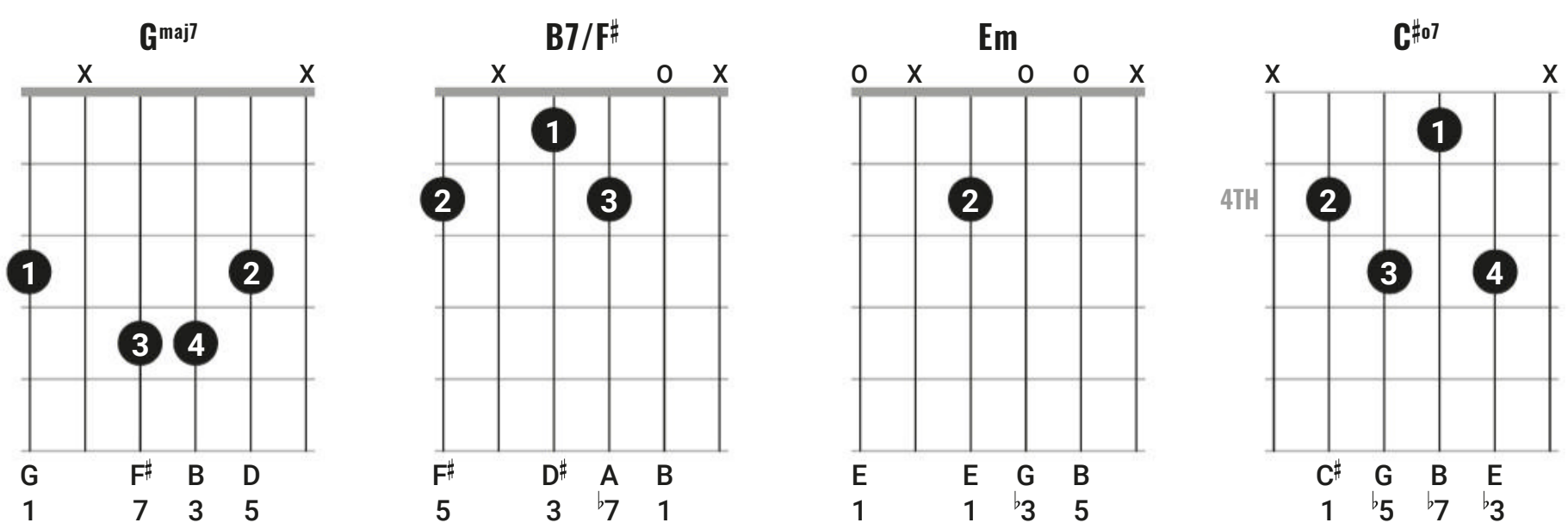
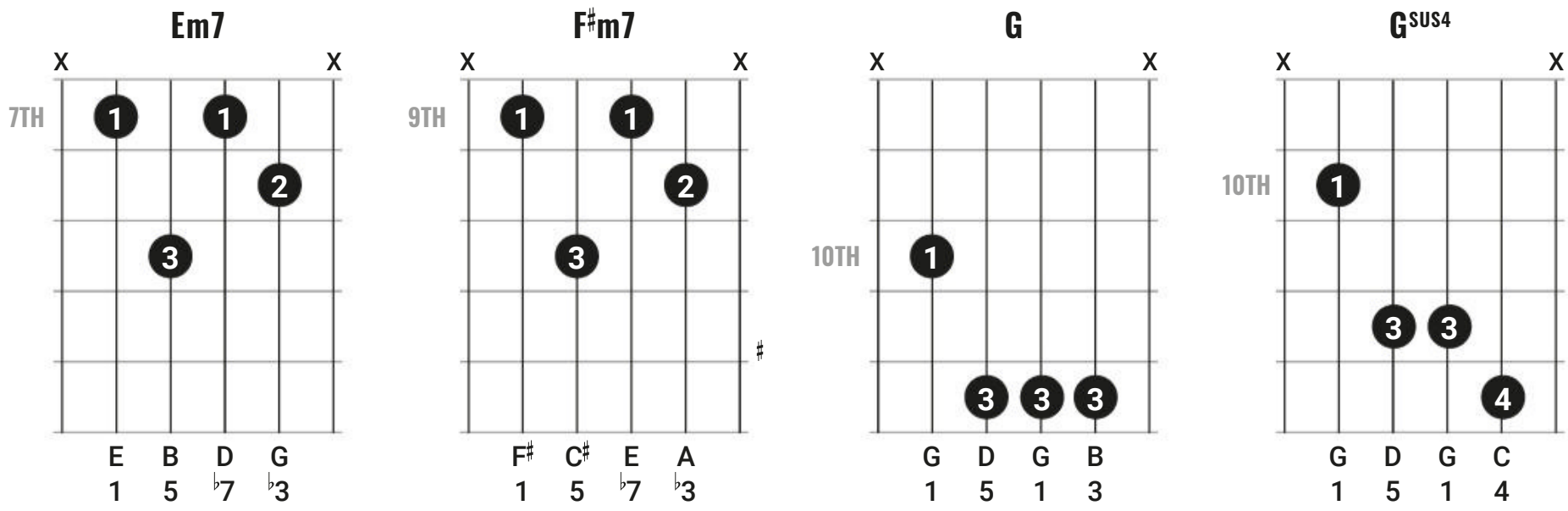
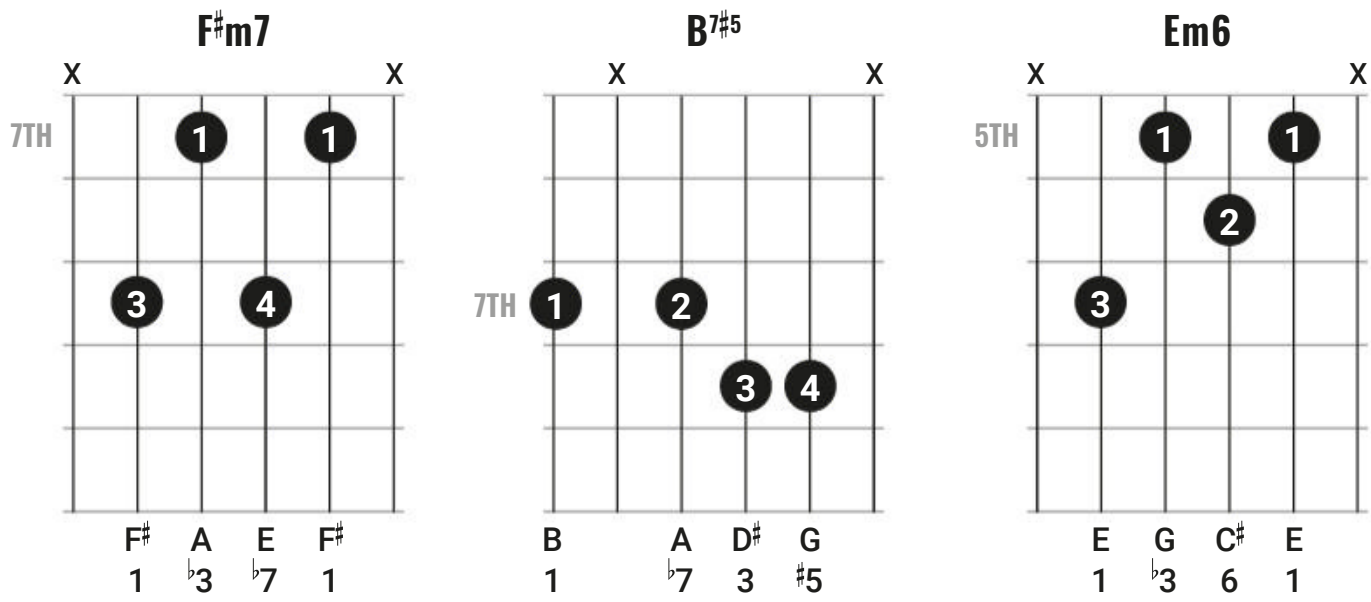


FIGURE 4

This phrase is inspired by a guitar intro in the key of E minor, suggesting a slightly darker mood. Give the chords a bar each, and with two bars on the last chord, you should be able to make an eight-bar sequence. With two different voicings of F♯m7, a B7♯5 and an E minor sixth, it's a great way of seeing how these colourful chord voicings can be put together to make meaningful musical statements.





TALKBOX

BILL KIRCHEN

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The titan of the Telecaster has been a mainstay of country guitar music for the best part of 50 years. Here he tells us how it all began, and why mixing exotic dancers and Christmas is a bad idea

The moment it all started...

"Mississippi John Hurt. First on record and then live at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival."

I couldn't live without my...

"A Telecaster and an acoustic. Oh, did you say just one? Sorry."

The one that got away...

"Maybe my first guitar, a Harmony Sovereign. I sure liked it. It would be fun to hear it today. I bet it was a good one."

My signature model...

"Just a regular Telecaster with a three-position switch, the switch plate and the tone and volume knobs all reversed. I'd have my granddaughters, who are seven and 11 years old, design the paint job."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"Fingerpicking stuff in G or maybe *Buckaroo* on the Tele!"

The best advice I've ever been given...

"Find people better than you to play with."

My Spinal Tap moment...

"Playing a Christmas party where the hosts hired a stripper dressed like Santa Claus. She was doing her thing on a picnic table, slipped in her high heels and fell on my trombone. It kind of cushioned her fall, so she was okay. It wrecked the trombone though."

My guilty pleasure...

"It's hard to feel guilty about music but I know the category you mean. I still like *Popsicles And Icicles* by The Murmaids but I'm not guilty about it. At 72, that ship has luckily sailed. It was the last pop hit like that before The Beatles rolled in."

I'm in the band...

"The Beatles!"

I wish I was there...

"I've been lucky; I saw Merle Haggard open for Buck Owens. I saw Dylan go electric. I saw Son House and Howlin' Wolf. I saw Ray Charles up close in a night club. So, I'm good, thanks. I don't want to be greedy!"

If I could just play one thing...

"Jazz from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. I can play jazzy, so some people think I can play jazz. But nobody who actually plays jazz thinks that." G

Bill Kirchen's new retrospective album *The Proper Years* is out now via The Last Music Company

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